



*THE ENGLISH NOVELISTS*

BULWER-LYTTON





# BULWER-LYTTON

*by*

THE EARL OF LYTTON, K.G.

“The most real side of every life, from the earliest dawn of mind in the infant, is the romantic.”

*The Parisians*

*London*

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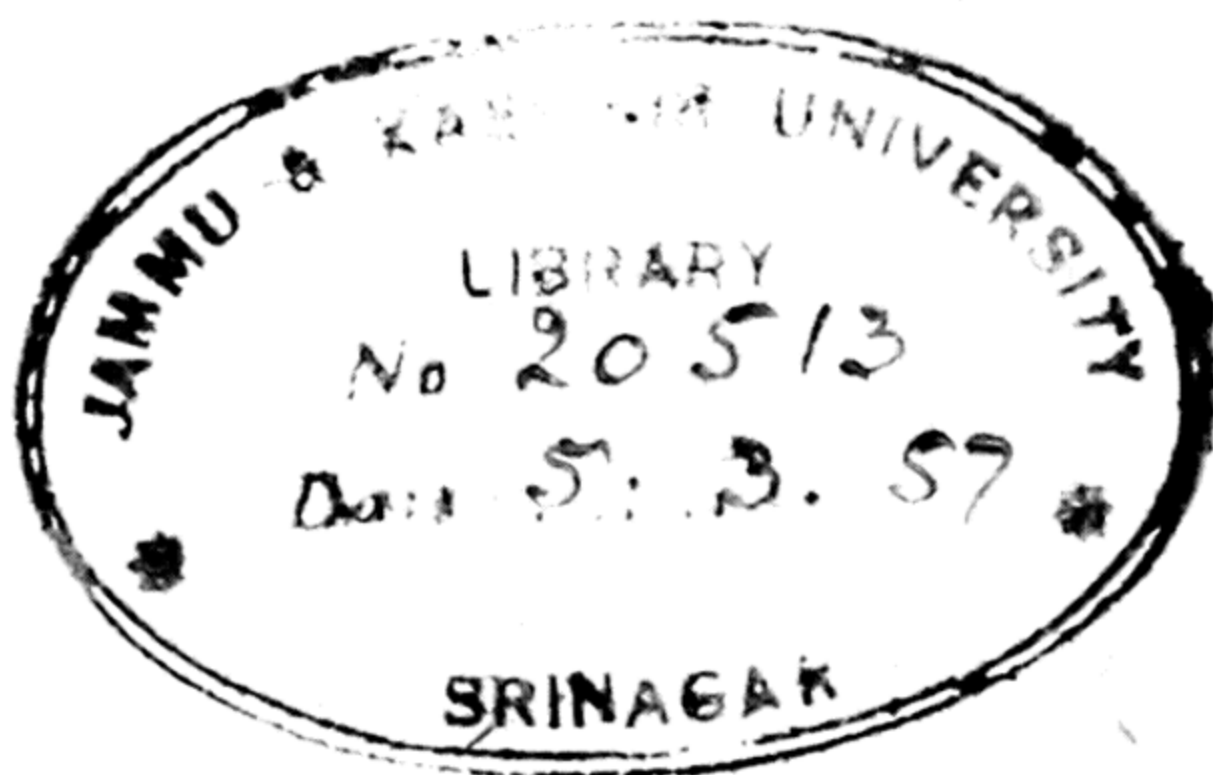


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## BIOGRAPHICAL DATES

- 1803. 25th May, Edward George Earle Bulwer-Lytton born.
- 1807. His father died.
- 1812. First school-days.
- 1814. Studied under a tutor at Ealing.
- 1822. Fellow-commoner of Trinity Hall, Cambridge.
- 1824-6. Travel in England and abroad.
- 1827. 30th August, married Rosina Wheeler.  
*Falkland* published.
- 1828. *Pelham* and *The Disowned*.
- 1829. *Devereux*.
- 1830. *Paul Clifford*.
- 1831. Became editor of *The New Monthly* and M.P. for St. Ives.
- 1832. *Eugene Aram*.  
M.P. for Lincoln (voted for Reform Bill).
- 1833. *Godolphin*.  
Breakdown of health, journey to Italy and first separation from his wife.
- 1834. *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Letter to a Late Cabinet Minister*.  
Met actor-manager Macready.
- 1835. *Rienzi*.
- 1836. Final separation from his wife.
- 1837. *The Duchess de Vallière* (first play) and *Ernest Maltravers*.
- 1838. *The Lady of Lyons* and *Alice*.
- 1839. *The Sea Captain*.
- 1840. *Money*.
- 1841. *Night and Morning*.  
Resigned seat in House of Commons.
- 1842. *Zanoni*.

- 1843. *The Last of the Barons.*
  - 1846. *Lucretia.*
  - 1848. *Harold and King Arthur.*
  - 1849. *The Caxtons.*
  - 1851. Joined Conservative party.
  - 1852. M.P. for Hertford.
  - 1853. *My Novel.*
  - 1858. *What Will He Do With It ?*  
Secretary of State for the Colonies.
  - 1860. *St. Stephens.*
  - 1861. *A Strange Story.*
  - 1866. Raised to the peerage as Lord Lytton.
  - 1871. *The Coming Race.*
  - 1872. *The Parisians* (unfinished) began to appear.
  - 1873. *Kenelm Chillingly.*
- Lord Lytton died on 18th January.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Apart from the novelist's own works, the most important sources are :

*The Life Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, by his son. (Kegan Paul, 1883.)

*The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton*, by his grandson. (Macmillan, 1913.)



## CHAPTER I

### THE BACKGROUND

“It was the May when I was born.”—*Poems*.

SPRING was ripening into summer towards the end of May in the year 1803. The chestnut trees were in flower and the bluebells were beginning to unfold in the woods ; but England at that moment was approaching the darkest and most dangerous period in her history. The brief peace which had been concluded at Amiens in March of the previous year had just come to an end—“a short and feverish interval of unrefreshing repose,” as Canning called it—and the long-drawn-out war with France had begun again. Previous to this interval, it had already lasted for nine years : it was to continue for another twelve. Napoleon was beginning to assemble at Boulogne his armies and fleet of ships for the invasion of England. The ageing King George III had not yet permanently lost his reason, but he had already had one attack, and was beginning to feel the approach of that darkness which was to engulf his faculties at the end of his long reign. William Pitt, who had gone into retirement after his resignation three years earlier, returned once more to the House of Commons, where he was acclaimed as the only man who could save the country in the extremity of its danger.

On May the 23rd and 24th the House debated the state of the nation. On the first day Pitt spoke for two hours and a half. The speech was a great personal triumph. Of the two hundred new Members who had been returned at the



General Election of the previous year, many had never heard him speak before. Those who knew him well were shocked by his haggard appearance—evidence that, young though he still was, he was worn out by sickness and the heavy burden of responsibility which he had carried for so long. He had, in fact, only three more years to live. On the second day Fox spoke for three hours, and the debate was concluded on May the 25th.

That night, at 31 Baker Street, Elizabeth Barbara, daughter and heiress of Richard Warburton Lytton, and wife of General Bulwer of Heydon Hall, Norfolk, gave birth to her third son. This child was christened Edward George Earle Lytton and is the subject of this biography.

The London into which he was born was very different from the London of to-day. It was still but little changed from the days of Queen Elizabeth. The industrial revolution which followed the discovery of coal and the application of machinery to industry had not yet taken place. There were no railways or steamboats, no factories or complicated manufacturing processes, no electric telegraph, and only a slow and expensive postal delivery. Envelopes were not in use : letters were written with goose-quill pens, folded with a blank page for the address, and sealed. Members of Parliament were privileged to send their letters free if franked by their signature. There was no gas or electric light—none, in fact, of the conveniences which to-day we regard as necessities rather than luxuries. Indoor lighting was done by candles, and the tinder-box, snuffers and snuffer-trays were indispensable household implements. In place of the brilliantly lighted streets of our modern towns, those who left their houses at night had to grope their way along in

comparative darkness, or employ the services of link boys to carry torches in front of them, which were put out at their doors by iron extinguishers, still to be seen to-day outside some old houses in London.

People travelled in stage-coaches or private carriages along roads infested with highwaymen or barred by turnpikes. In the country parishes ladies rode pillion on horseback behind their husbands to church on Sundays, and dismounted at the church door by means of the upping stones, some of which still exist. On week-days the farmers' wives accompanied their husbands to market in similar fashion. Duelling was still practised. Smuggling was carried on all round the coasts. Press-gang crews paraded the country, and carried off recruits for the Navy.

The great industrial towns of the North, where almost the whole of the great manufacturing business of the country is now carried on, were then mere villages or lonely moors. The vast sprawl of modern London had not begun. Kensington and Marylebone were village suburbs surrounded by fields or woods. There was a turnpike at Hyde Park Corner. Oxford Street was then called Tybourne Road, and on the site of the Marble Arch stood the gallows where criminals were hanged in public. Eaton Square was lonely meadowland. Brixton, Islington and Hackney were fields of corn. Battersea was a swamp, and the Cromwell Road was a muddy lane down which meandered a sluggish stream.

Such was the world into which Edward Bulwer was born on May 25th, 1803, and it is important to remember, when we read the books of which he was to become the author, how very different was the age to which he belonged from that in which we now live. We must judge both his



sentiments and his style by the light of his age rather than our own.

There is no record that the little Edward was ever taken as a child to the Norfolk home of his parents. He was born, he tells us himself in his autobiography, when his mother's married life was saddest. His father, who suffered from gout, was so irritable, jealous and violent, that his mother had declared she would never set foot in his house again. General Bulwer himself was not living at Heydon at this time. He had raised two regiments at his own expense for the defence of the country, and the military district over which he presided had its headquarters at Preston, in Lancashire. He died when Teddy was only four years old.

His mother moved from Baker Street to Montagu Square, and from there to Nottingham Place. His eldest brother, William, who succeeded his father at Heydon, went to a preparatory school, and his second brother, Henry, lived with his grandmother at another house in London. Teddy's nursery days, therefore, were spent alone with his mother, who lavished on him all the love which had been denied expression for her husband or her other children. Between the two there was at that time great affection and sympathy. The mother would recite poetry—Goldsmith and Gray—with a musical voice and dramatic gestures, or read from Homer stories of the siege of Troy. The little son listened enraptured, his soul on fire, and began, even before he could write, to compose verses of his own.

Their life in London was varied by occasional visits to Teddy's eccentric old grandfather, Richard Warburton Lytton. This scholarly gentleman was not then living at Knebworth, which was either shut up or occupied

by others, but at St. Lawrence. The house and its occupant were thus described by his grandson in after years :

“ My grandfather at that time lived in a house at St. Lawrence, near Ramsgate ; a house of no ostentatious pretensions, but of fair size for the neighbourhood of a watering-place ; a patch of garden in front, and a much larger garden behind. I should know the house well, for it was afterwards tenanted by a gentleman with whom I passed several months as a pupil. My recollection of the place, however, as it was in my grandfather's time, is indistinct. I have a confused perception of a vast number of books—of books that haunted me in every room I entered. I think they even lined the landing-place on the staircase. I cannot disentangle my recollection of the house from the presence of the books. Beyond these, I have a vague recollection of green sward and lilac boughs ; no doubt the attributes of the back garden. Types are these reminiscences of the tastes of my after life ; a passion for books, and a passion for the green sward and the blossom on the bough, even though in the confines of a back garden.

“ Of my grandfather himself, I can just recall the visions of a short and rather stout man in black. He had been very slight in youth, but expanded in the indolence of after years. Besides the black dress, which was neat and formal, I have also an awful impression of a dignified shovel hat. I can remember, moreover, that my grandfather ate very fast, with a book beside him on the table ; that he was extremely short-sighted ; that he sate in a quaint, queer-looking, and mightily uncomfortable arm-chair (which I have now), and that in his immediate vicinity there were generally two great globes on mahogany stands.

“ At that time, I believe, this erudite Scholar had pretty well exhausted such learning as he thought worth the achieving, and that he had become a great novel-reader ; but I think the novels were not in English. I rather fancy they were Spanish. He had a collection of books of chivalry which might have satisfied Don Quixote, and for these he had Don Quixote's partiality. . . .

“ I suppose there was something in my mother which made those connected with her set a very high value on her affection, for she never could escape from the compliment of a jealous desire to monopolise it. Through me she was still tormented, and on me the consequences of that jealousy retributively fell.

“ Out of jealousy for my mother’s love, my father had positively disliked me ; for the same cause my grandmother took me into open aversion—an aversion unsoftened to her dying day ; and my grandfather, who ought, if conscious of the future, to have welcomed and petted me, as the one of his grandsons destined to live the most amongst books, did not suffer me to be four-and-twenty hours in the house before he solemnly assured his daughter ‘ that I should break her heart, and (what was worse) that I should never know my A.B.C.’ He maintained this ill opinion of my disposition and talents with the obstinacy which he carried into most of his articles of belief ; and I cannot call to mind ever having received from him a caress or a kind word.”

Richard Warburton Lytton died on December 30th, 1810, when Teddy was seven years old. The great library which he had collected had to be sold to defray his debts, and the coming of these books to his mother’s house in London made a deep impression on the child’s mind. Of this incident he wrote in his autobiography :

“ Wain and van rolled up the streets of Marylebone and startled the doze of dowagers in Nottingham Place. You might have thought you saw ‘ the carts of Zagathai laden with houses—a great city travelling towards you.’ They came, the mighty Nomads—the grand, restless race—the disturbers of all antique landmarks—the convulsers and conquerors of the globe. They came, the Souls of the Dead, file and rank, in the armament of Books !

“ Behold the great event of my infant life—my Siege of Troy, my Persian Invasion, my Gallic Revolution—the Arrival of my Grandfather’s Books !



“The learned Deluge flowed into that calm still world of Home ; it mounted the stairs, it rolled on, floor upon floor ; the trim face of drawing-rooms vanished before it ; no attic, the loftiest, escaped from the flood.

“But the grand reservoir, the Lake Moeris of the whole inundation, was the great dining-room ; and there, when the flood settled, I rested mine infant ark.

“My mother then spent her days almost entirely either with Mrs. Lytton, who perhaps she still fancied needed soothing and comfort, or with lawyers.

“So the house, with all its new treasures, was given up to me. Having duly visited all the lesser, if loftier, settlements of the immigration, I finally, as I before said, settled myself habitually in the dining-room, which I regarded as the central camp of the invading hordes. Words cannot paint the sensations of awe, of curiosity, of wonder, of delight, with which I dwelt in that City of the Dead. Even now, when I think of them, I am in a fever, and grope darkly at my meaning through all confusion and change of metaphor, and vague big words, which crumble away as I clutch at them in despair. Books I had known familiarly before, but they had been given me with reserve—taken, one by one at a time, from mahogany cases under lock and key, with cautions not to dog-ear, and an infinity of troublesome restrictions. But here I was a chartered libertine. I might throw the handkerchief as I liked. I was not married to a single volume, in a humdrum-monogynical connection. I was Solomon in all his glory, and surrounded by all his seraglio. . . . Where I found a book in English it sufficed for me, no matter how dry and how far above my reason ; I still looked and lingered—read and wondered. All variety of dim ideas thus met and mingled in my brain. Many an atom of knowledge, chipped off from the block and stored up unconsciously in the mind, was whirled into movement in later years, in the golden dance of those sunbeams, our thoughts.

“I must, in this way, have blundered through many defiles of Bookland, deep and abstruse. I remember that I was specially interested in a work upon calculation, which was accompanied and illustrated by a little wooden machine with round balls. I dare say I should make less of it now than I did then. I must

certainly have got ankle-deep in the great slough of Metaphysics, for I remember, as if it were yesterday, after sitting long silent and musing, I addressed to my mother the following simple and childlike question :

“ ‘ Pray, mamma, are you not sometimes overcome by the sense of your own identity ? ’ ”

“ My mother looked up at me in amazed alarm. Quoth she, ‘ It is high time you should go to school, Teddy.’ And so it was ; that I might enter into the healthfulness of scholastic Duncedom.

“ There came a precise, cold-blooded man, who took up the books, glanced at their title-pages, and laid them down again without saying a word. I looked at him with savage eyes ; I felt instinctively that his visits would end in my spoliation. And so it proved. One morning my mother and I got into the carriage ; we were absent two or three days, and when we returned the books had vanished. . . .

“ We set out in the carriage, while that precise cold-blooded man cleared the rooms in Nottingham Place of their poor tenants, whose time there was so short, and we arrived at Knebworth.

“ The house with its long outwalls, that seemed to me measureless, emerged on my view as we drove through the park. For the rest, I can only recall broken reminiscences of a deep, gloomy archway, of a long gallery covered with portraits, and chambers in which the tapestry seemed rotting on the walls.

“ When I again saw Knebworth, the work of demolition was begun. My mother had resolved to pull down three sides of the great quadrangle, and confine the house to the fourth side, which, indeed, was sufficiently capacious for estates so diminished by former proprietors.”

The excuse given here for the demolition of three sides of the old Tudor house at Knebworth was that it was too large for the diminished revenue of the estate to maintain. In an inscription which Bulwer-Lytton put up in the porch of the house, when he had succeeded to it after his mother's death, it is stated that this demolition was rendered necessary



because those parts which were pulled down were "too ruinous to inhabit." It is questionable whether either of these excuses was the real cause of Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton's action. The house was visited in 1805 by a man who apparently took pleasure in travelling about the country and making sketches of the houses which he saw *en route*. As a rule, he made one sketch of each one visited, but so impressed was he by Knebworth House that he made four sketches, one from each side, as well as plans of each floor, giving the dimensions of every room, and he described it in these words: "After Haddon Hall in Derbyshire I consider this the most perfect specimen of the hospitable habitations of our ancestors which I have seen in this country." The book which contains these sketches and description is entitled *A Journey from Camerton to London and thence into Hertfordshire*, and is preserved among the manuscripts in the British Museum. It was written only six years before the demolition began, and neither the sketches nor the description suggests that the house was "half tumbling down" or "too ruinous to inhabit." As for the expense of its upkeep, Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton's heirs and successors for two generations have spent, on enlarging the house she left them, more money than would have sufficed to keep the original edifice in perfect repair, as well as fitting it with modern requirements. Moreover, its present coating of cement with its pseudo-Gothic "embellishments" is a perpetual source of heavy expense to succeeding generations.

The more likely reason for the alterations was that the "perfect specimen" of Tudor brickwork did not satisfy the taste of a romantic age. It was too plain, too farm-like, and had to be given the appearance of a castle. Mrs.



Bulwer-Lytton not only removed three sides of the original quadrangle, but covered the remaining west wing with cement, put battlements round the roof, and erected eight battlemented towers, thus converting a beautiful brick manor-house into a rather gloomy-looking, cement castle. Her son, who was steeped in the romantic insincerity of his age, added copper domes with gilded vanes to her towers, thus making his castle merry and giving it a semi-oriental appearance.

But that day had not yet come. In 1812 that son was only nine years old, and was sent to school in order to lose "the sense of his own identity."

After two weeks in one school and two years in another, where he suffered all the torments of a sensitive child at the hands of little tyrants of his own age, learned the rudiments of Latin and Greek and read voraciously when left to himself, he spent two happy, profitable years with a sympathetic tutor at Ealing, and experienced an early romantic love affair which left tender memories in his mind to the end of his life. Finally, in 1822, at the age of nineteen, he went to Cambridge, where he spent three years as a fellow-commoner at Trinity Hall. In his last year at Cambridge he won the Chancellor's Medal with a poem on "Sculpture." He was now a young man in the prime of life, full of vigour both mental and physical. Though never very robust in health, and in no sense an athlete, he enjoyed exercise in the open air both on foot and on horseback, and attained some proficiency in fencing. Though not a scholar, his knowledge of Latin and Greek was above the average, and he was well grounded in history. His wide reading gave him an easy command of his own language, and his career as an author began early.

Whilst he was still with his tutor at Ealing, he had published a small volume of poetry, called *Ishmael, an Oriental Tale, with other Poems*, most of which had been written in his years of childhood. Before he left Cambridge he had published another volume of poems, called *Delmour, or a Tale of a Sylphid, and other Poems*, sketched out his first novel, *Falkland*, and written the first chapter of *Pelham*, filled many commonplace books with notes, which included a sketch for a History of the British Public, and written some of the poems which were privately printed in 1826, under the title of *Weeds and Wildflowers*.

I have passed over briefly the years of Edward Bulwer's childhood and schooldays, because these have already been told twice in considerable detail, first in the two volumes published by my father in 1883,<sup>1</sup> and secondly in the two volumes which I published in 1913.<sup>2</sup> During those years the war with France had been brought to a successful conclusion. The battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo had been fought and won. The Congress of Vienna had finished its work, Napoleon was a prisoner at St. Helena, and the Bourbons were restored to the throne of France. Louis XVIII had just died and been succeeded by his unpopular brother, Charles X. Pitt and Fox and Castlereagh were dead. The old King George III, who permanently lost his reason in 1810, had died in 1820, and the Prince Regent now reigned as George IV. England had added to her colonial possessions as the result of the wars with France, and had now entered upon a period of peace which she was to enjoy for a hundred years. She had complete

<sup>1</sup> *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton*, by his son. (Kegan Paul, 1883.)

<sup>2</sup> *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton*, by his grandson. (Macmillan, 1913.)

supremacy at sea and had absorbed nearly the whole of the carrying trade of the world. She stood on the threshold of a period of great industrial and commercial expansion and of extraordinary intellectual achievement. In the age of writers which was just beginning, the young man who left college in 1824 was to play a prominent part, and to earn by his tremendous mental activity an established position among his great contemporaries.



## TRAVELS AT HOME AND ABROAD

"You are eighteen, and a poet ! What more can you desire ?"—*Maltravers*.

BEFORE his career of authorship began in earnest, Edward Bulwer spent two years in travel, first in his own country and then abroad. A journey from one part of England to another in those days was a slow process and had to be accomplished by stage-coach or on horseback. The result was that the traveller met with many adventures on the road. Bulwer has described in some detail in his autobiography his own experiences on these travels, and in later years many of them were embodied in his books. In this short biography only a few can be briefly indicated.

The travels began with a visit to the home of his Cambridge friend, William Ord, in Northumberland, at the beginning of a long vacation in 1824. From there he made a pilgrimage to the Lake District, and spent a night vigil at the grave of his Ealing love, at Ullswater. The emotions of that night were recorded the next day at Windermere in a long poem called "The Tale of a Dreamer," which was afterwards included in *Weeds and Wildflowers*—a collection of early verses privately printed in Paris, but never published. "What I suffered, in one long solitary night, I will not say," he wrote in his autobiography. "At dawn I turned from the place, as if re-baptised or reborn. I recovered the healthful tone of my mind ; and the stage of experience and feeling through which my young life had

passed contributed largely to render me whatever I have since become."

As this boyish romance made so deep an impression on Bulwer's mind at the time, and memories of it occur again and again in his books right up to the end of his life, a brief account of the facts must here be given.

While he was living with his tutor, Mr. Wallington, at Ealing, he met a young girl of his own age ; and with the first stirrings of adolescent emotion these two young people felt that they were made for each other. It was a case of "We loved, Sir, used to meet." No word of love was actually spoken between them. Their meetings took place, unknown to anyone else, on the banks of the little river Brent. Their companionship satisfied all the needs of their hearts. They had no plans, content each day when they parted to know that they would meet on the morrow. At last a day came when there was no to-morrow. The girl failed to keep her appointment, and Edward never saw her again. Three years later came a letter, saying that she had been forced into a marriage against which her heart rebelled, that she loved him and could never love anyone else. Obedience to duty could not kill that love, and deep unhappiness, endured for three years, had destroyed her health. She was writing with her dying hand, and begged him to visit her grave.

It was this deep emotional experience which throughout his life Bulwer always associated with running water. It was the memory of a child that could never grow old that was in some measure infused in all the women whom he created in his novels, and, as he wrote himself, "my only notion of beauty is something that resembles her."

After a short sojourn at Ambleside, he walked on into

Scotland. Entering Edinburgh, he wished that he had some Scottish blood in his veins, little realising then that a day would come when literature would give him the tie that he lacked by birth, and that he would be elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University for three years in succession, in preference to the Duke of Argyll.

Returning from Leith by ship, he was so prostrated by sea-sickness that he was put ashore at Scarborough, where he stayed at a small commercial inn and had an amusing encounter with a disconsolate widower, who subsequently provided him with the character of Mr. Graves in his comedy of *Money*.

Continuing on foot southwards, he met one evening a young gipsy girl of striking beauty. She offered to tell his fortune, and after looking at his hand, astonished him with this strikingly accurate reference to past events in his life :

“ Chut ! chut ! ” she said, “ but you have known sorrows already. You lost your father when you were very young. You have brothers, but no sister. Ah ! you have had a sweetheart when you were a mere boy. You will never see her again, never. The line is clean broken off. It cut you to the heart. You nearly died of it. You have conquered, but you’ll never be as gay again.”

Then turning to the future, she said, “ You are a prosperous gentleman, you will never come to want, you will be much before the world and raise your head high, but I fear you’ll not have the honours you count on now. Chut ! chut ! pity ! pity ! you’ll know scandal and slander, you’ll be spoken ill of where you least deserve. That will vex you much, but you are proud and will not stoop to show it. Your best friends and your worst enemies will be women. You’ll hunger for love all your life, and you will have much



of it, but less satisfaction than sorrow. Chut ! chut ! how often will you be your own enemy ! But don't be downhearted, there is plenty of good fortune and success in store for you."

Struck by the beauty of the girl, and wishing to learn more of the community to which she belonged, Bulwer asked if he might spend a few days with them. The offer was cordially welcomed, not only by the girl, but also by her grandmother and the other members of the company when they reached the encampment. Five or six happy days were spent with these gipsies, and the opportunity of becoming intimate with the young girl, to whom he gave the name of Mimy, was fully utilised by Bulwer. He spent as much time as possible in her company, and love was spoken of between them. Indeed Mimy even proposed that they might be married after the gipsy rites, which consisted in breaking a piece of burned earth into two halves and living together for five years, after which each was free to go his own way. Bulwer's comment when relating the incident was, "Alas ! I went further for a wife and fared worse."

This intimacy aroused the jealousy and resentment of some of the young men in the camp, and they intimated that he must depart at once.

After leaving the gipsies, Bulwer continued his journey to London on his way to visit his mother at Broadstairs, and then returned to Cambridge.

A year later, in the autumn of 1825, he went abroad for the first time. He first stayed at Boulogne with a friend, Frederick Villiers (subsequently used as a model for *Pelham*), for whom he acted as second in a duel, and then went on to Paris. Here, he tells us in his autobiography, he was

admitted into circles not often open to foreigners of his age. He became intimate in some of the most brilliant houses of the old *noblesse* who lived in the Faubourg St. Germain, and mentions being received with special kindness by the Marquise de la Rochejacquelin, the heroine of La Vendée, and her two charming daughters, who spoke English perfectly and impressed him greatly with their dignity, sprightliness and gallantry. He was also received with marked courtesy by the principal members of the Administration.

The man to whom he owed most of his introductions was a certain Irish priest called Abbé Kinsela, the confessor of Madame de Polignac, the wife of Charles X's Minister, and a Jesuit held in great respect by the chiefs of the Legitimist party. This good friend he described as a man of much learning, knowledge of the world and *savoir faire*, and an able politician without any personal ambition.

These kind and interesting friends made my grandfather's first visit to the French capital so enjoyable that throughout his life Paris held a special place in his heart. Not only did he revisit it frequently, but he subsequently chose it as the scene for many of his novels. It provided both the title and the theme of the last of them all, which was left unfinished when he died.

This visit also provided him with the third and last of his youthful love affairs. Among the distinguished families where he was made so welcome he met a young lady who had passed her childhood in England, and who had a marked preference for English ways and literature. With this young lady he became intimate, and the Abbé Kinsela was very anxious to bring about a match between them. As the lady was well-born and possessed a very good fortune, there



appeared to be only one obstacle to their union—she was a Roman Catholic. Bulwer wrote to ascertain his mother's feelings in the matter, saying that his heart was not "irrevocably gone," but that he felt "he could be very happy in the union." Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton replied emphatically opposing such a marriage, as she had a horror of popery. This decided the matter, and Bulwer ceased to visit at the house where he had been so familiar a guest, and sought distraction partly in the world and partly in literary composition. A fit of deep melancholy was the consequence, for he admitted that it required a stronger effort than he had first supposed to wrench his thoughts from the prospect that had been so alluringly held out to him. He accordingly left Paris, took an apartment at Versailles where he knew no one, and forced himself to ride out daily for many hours till he had recovered his peace of mind. "All my life through," he wrote, "I have found the necessity of intervals of complete solitude for the cure of the morbid symptoms which half solitude engenders."

## CHAPTER III

### MARRIAGE

“The false devotion is the true despair.”—*La Vallière*.

THE marriage between Edward Bulwer and Rosina Wheeler was a tragic failure. The love with which it began was short-lived, and the hatred which it ultimately engendered produced the utmost misery for both of them to the end of their lives. The story has been told in detail with all the correspondence which passed between them. It is worthy of study as a human document, because the elements which went to the making of this tragedy are clearly traceable at each stage of its development, and the same elements are to be found in varying degrees in the story of almost every unhappy marriage. If only we could learn from the example of others, how much suffering in the world would be avoided. But unfortunately we all think that our experiences are unique, and though we can see clearly the mistakes which others make, we are all blind to our own.

This short biography deals exclusively with my grandfather as a writer, and I am only concerned with the circumstances of his marriage in so far as they affected the development of his character and influenced his writings. The story can therefore be retold shortly without the documentary evidence upon which it is based.

On the evening of his return from the Continent, Edward Bulwer called at his mother's house in Upper Seymour Street, and, at her request, accompanied her to a party given

by a Miss Benger. While there, his mother drew his attention to a singularly beautiful young girl who had just entered the room. He turned in the direction indicated and beheld "his fate before him." They were introduced and were at once attracted by each other. Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton invited this new acquaintance to her house and thus afforded them the opportunity to become better acquainted.

Rosina Doyle Wheeler, the young lady in question, was the daughter of Irish parents. Her father, Francis Massey Wheeler of Lizzard Connel, in the county of Limerick, had married at the age of seventeen a very beautiful girl two years younger than himself. This marriage between a boy of seventeen and a girl of fifteen ended in a separation after the birth of six children, four of whom died in infancy. Mrs. Wheeler, who received, by the deed of separation, the custody of her two surviving daughters, Henrietta and Rosina, went with them to Guernsey, where she lived for some time with her uncle, Sir John Doyle, who was then Governor of the Island. When Rosina was twelve years old, her mother went to France and settled at Caen. Here she became the centre of a small group of Socialists and free-thinkers; and it was in such society that her two daughters grew up.

At the age of seventeen Rosina left the home where she had never found either happiness or affection, and went to live with a friend of the family, Miss Greene, in Ireland. From this friend she received a full measure of the love and sympathy which she had never found at home, but also a good deal of criticism, which she resented. Miss Greene was an orthodox and prudish maiden lady who was horrified at Rosina's caustic wit and contempt for all conventions, whether of opinion or behaviour. This wide divergence of



outlook prevented the older lady from having a helpful influence on her young protégée, and Rosina took a mischievous pleasure in shocking Miss Greene by stories of how she had been "dragged up," of her mother's vanity and violent temper, and by remarking after a meeting with her father, "Don't you think Papa very vulgar? Did you see his worsted stockings?" Colonel Wheeler died two years later, and left his small property to Henrietta.

Rosina then left Miss Greene and went to live with her great-uncle, Sir Francis Doyle, in London. Here she made the acquaintance of several literary people—Thomas Campbell, Walter Savage Landor, Miss Landon, and Lady Caroline Lamb. In this company she would have heard Edward Bulwer spoken of as a young man of ability whose poem had recently won the Chancellor's Medal at Cambridge, and her interest in him was therefore already aroused when they met for the first time.

In April 1826, when this meeting took place at Miss Benger's evening party, Rosina Wheeler was twenty-four years old, strikingly beautiful, with perfect features, dark hair that fell over the whitest of shoulders, a complexion of the purest pink and white, sparkling eyes, and a manner of easy self-possession. Her conversation was vivacious, and scintillated with native Irish wit. She was in love with life, ardently desiring to be admired, and well versed in the art of captivating others. She had all a child's eagerness to make the most of whatever chance might throw in her way, but no more than a child's power to shape her own destiny from day to day.

It is not surprising that Edward Bulwer at once fell in love with this fascinating young woman. He was extremely susceptible, and his boyish love affairs at Ealing, with Mimy

the gipsy, and more recently with the girl in Paris, had left him in a despondent mood of frustrated romance. He was ready for a new emotion, and fell at once at the first opportunity which offered itself.

During the summer the two young people met frequently, both in London and at Brompton, where Rosina stayed as the guest of Lady Caroline Lamb, and Edward rode over from Knebworth to meet her. In August their love had become mutually acknowledged, and their marriage openly discussed.

So far all had gone well, and there appeared to be no reason why love's young dream might not develop into a satisfactory partnership for life. Anyone who knew the characters and tastes of these two young people could have foretold even at that date that they were not suited to make each other permanently happy, but if other agencies had not intervened, they might at least have settled into a partnership of mutual tolerance, and provided their children with a reasonably happy home. But the fact which made inevitable the shipwreck of their lives was the attitude of Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton. It was the irony of fate that Edward's mother should have been the first to introduce him to Rosina, and provide him with the opportunity of becoming intimate with her, since she was also the principal agency both in bringing about their marriage and in precipitating its failure.

In the case of the young lady in Paris with whom Bulwer had contemplated marriage, his mother's strong objection had proved a decisive factor. But the conditions then were entirely different. In the first place his own heart was not very seriously engaged, and he deliberately invited his mother's opinion before allowing it to become so. Secondly, his mother's objection was limited to the fact that the family



was Roman Catholic, and no argument was raised between them which concerned the character of the young lady herself. The objection was conveyed by letter, on receipt of which Bulwer broke off all intercourse with the French family, left Paris, and soon afterwards returned to England. He had no knowledge, therefore, of the feelings of the girl at the abrupt termination of their friendship. The wound in his own heart was the only one to be healed, and as it was not deep this did not take long to accomplish.

In the case of his courtship of Rosina, Edward's heart was more seriously involved before his mother's opposition became known to him. Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton's objections in this case were to Rosina's character, her upbringing, her friends and associates—all matters on which her son felt bound to defend the girl he loved. Arguments between mother and son were inevitable, and engendered some bitterness and reproaches on both sides. His mother's attitude was also the subject of discussion between Edward and Rosina ; and whilst he felt free to criticise his mother himself, his family pride resented criticism from another.

Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton knew her son better than anyone else, and fully realised that Rosina Wheeler was not the kind of wife who would bring him happiness. She loved him deeply and wished to save him, but sought to accomplish this by authority rather than by sympathy. Edward also loved his mother dearly, and respected her judgment with his head while resenting it with his heart. In deference to her wishes, and knowing how deeply he was dependent on her, he did break off his engagement with Rosina, and promised his mother that he would never marry without her consent.

Unfortunately the mother received her son's submission,

not with love and tenderness but rather as an act of filial duty which she had a right to expect, almost as a headmaster might accept an apology from an erring schoolboy accompanied by a promise not to offend again. The result was that when two months later Edward heard that Rosina was ill and perhaps suffering on his account, his resolution broke down. As he wrote years afterwards of two lovers of his own creation : “ What, if in previously revealing his own heart, he had decoyed hers ? What, if by a desertion she had no right to anticipate, he had blighted her future ? . . . If this were so—what became the first claim on his honour, his conscience, his duty ? ” He hurried to Rosina’s side ; the engagement was renewed, and from this moment he felt it a greater obligation to marry her than to implement his promise to his mother.

A bitter correspondence passed between mother and son, with justifiable reproaches on both sides, and on August 30th, 1827, the marriage took place at St. James’s Church in London. After the wedding Edward and Rosina took up their residence at Woodcot House, a large country house about six miles from Reading, the post town of which bore the ominous title, Nettlebed. Here they spent two happy years, and here their first child, Emily, was born.

Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton now made her last and worst mistake by withdrawing her allowance, and forcing her son to a life of drudgery which injured his health and destroyed finally whatever chance had ever existed of his domestic happiness. Any mistake in tact or judgment, any hastiness of temper, any want of sympathy which she had shown before the marriage, were trifling errors compared with her great and fundamental mistake in refusing to countenance the marriage when once it was accomplished. Upon her, therefore, rests



a large measure of responsibility for the misery which followed.

In consequence of the withdrawal of his mother's allowance, Edward Bulwer was forced to employ his pen to make up the deficiency, and prodigious literary exertions were needed to earn sufficient money to meet the heavy expenses of his establishment. He had no income of his own and only a small capital of £6000 under his father's will, and his wife's income did not exceed £80 a year. Although his elder brother offered him financial help, he was too proud to accept it, and replied, "As I bake so will I brew." Having accepted the responsibility of marrying against his mother's wishes, he was determined that his wife should not suffer any loss of social position as a result. The choice of a large country house for their first married home, the maintenance of a carriage and several saddle horses, and later the purchase of a house in a fashionable quarter of London, may appear to-day to have been unnecessary extravagances, but those were days in which it was in fact necessary for those who wished to be accepted in good society to keep up the appearance of wealth.

Woodcot was occupied for two years. In January 1829 the young couple moved to 36 Hertford Street, which had been bought for £2570 and decorated at a further cost of £820. Here their second child, Edward Robert, was born in November 1831. During these years they were living at the rate of about £3000 a year, and this sum had to be earned annually by literary toil. Like Sir Walter Scott before him, Bulwer had to write for his living. During the ten years between his marriage and his final separation from his wife, he completed ten novels, two long poems, one play, a political pamphlet (which ran into twenty-one



editions in six weeks and influenced the result of an election), two volumes of essays—*England and the English* and *The Student* (which also contained several good short stories), and three volumes of the *History of Athens* (only two of which were published). At the same time he was editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, to which he contributed regularly. He also contributed articles to the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Westminster Review*, the *Monthly Chronicle*, the *Examiner*, the *Literary Gazette*, and other periodicals. From 1831 onwards he was also an active Member of Parliament.

Mr. S. C. Hall, who was his sub-Editor of *The New Monthly*, has thus described his methods of work : “ Bulwer’s industry was wonderful. I have known him write an article for *The New Monthly* overnight which I well knew he had not touched before late in the evening, but which was ready in the morning when I called for it.”

Such labour could not be accomplished without sacrifice of physical health and family ties. Fighting always against time, every hindrance and interruption was a provocation, and petty household worries were magnified into serious grievances. In the crowded, fevered life he was leading, his wife had no place. When he was not actually writing, or reading in preparation for it, he sought recreation and mental stimulus in the society of those whose presence and conversation helped to break the monotony of his perpetual drudgery. Thus he either dined out or invited others to his own table whose tastes and interests were most congenial to his own.

Whilst he toiled to give his wife every luxury and comfort which money could supply, he at the same time deprived her of his own companionship and the sympathetic personal attention she looked for in a husband. He became irritable

and subject to violent outbursts of temper, followed by passionate self-reproaches and reconciliations. Miss Greene, Rosina's friend, who stayed with them frequently, said of him, "He seemed like a man who has been flayed, and is sore all over."

Authors, artists and professional men whose livelihood depends on the favour of the public which they serve, and who give the whole of their working days to the business by which they live, seldom make good husbands, yet always need devoted wives. Their egoism is apt to demand from their home more than they contribute to it. At the end of his life my grandfather described the kind of wife he presumably would have appreciated, when he wrote in *The Parisians* that the woman whom Graham Vane married "must have mind enough to appreciate his—not to clash with it. She must be fitted with sympathies to be his dearest companion, his confidante in the hopes and fears which the slightest want of sympathy would make him keep ever afterwards pent within his breast. In herself worthy of distinction she must merge all distinction in his."

But Rosina was not at all that sort of woman; indeed she would have despised such a wife. She had plenty of mind, but it was intensely practical. She was just as egotistical as her young husband. She wanted to be amused, not pampered; she needed company in which she could shine by reason of her own beauty and talents, and not merely as the wife of a rising literary star. She had no domestic interests, and cared more for her dogs than her children. She did not share the insincerity of her age and used her sharp tongue effectively against pretence of any kind. In such circumstances the life at Hertford Street beneath its brilliant exterior grew daily more sombre.

At last, in 1833, Bulwer's health broke down altogether and they decided upon a journey to Italy for the sake of rest and change. This journey, which was to have been a second honeymoon, only served to accentuate the divergent temperaments of husband and wife. To Edward, the romantic, Rome and Pompeii provided material for two new novels. To Rosina, the rationalist, magnificent buildings, superb art collections and historical associations could not compensate for dirt and smells. Venice was spoilt by mosquitoes ; with Rome she was "thoroughly disappointed and disgusted." "It is," she wrote to Miss Greene, "without exception the most dirty, barbarous and dismal place I ever saw." As for Florence, "Cheltenham or any other little watering-place in England is twenty times a prettier town." Only at Naples was she satisfied, for there she found a friend who gave her the attention and admiration she had missed since her marriage. A Neapolitan prince paid her court, praised and flattered her, and filled the void in her aching heart. Her husband discovered the friendship, made a violent scene, and upbraided his wife for her infidelity. She retaliated by accusing him of neglect, said she no longer cared for him, and had given her heart to her new friend. Bulwer immediately brought his wife back to England. The journey home was a protracted nightmare of mutual recriminations, and soon after their return they decided to live apart for a time. The breach in their relations caused by the Naples affair was never healed. There were many meetings and reconciliations in the next two years, but these were always followed by more quarrels and separations, and each failure increased their estrangement. Although their letters contained terms of endearment to the end, real love had long since died on both sides, and finally a deed



of judicial separation was signed between them in April 1836.

But, alas ! the separation was not the end of this unhappy story. It was but the beginning of a new period of bitterness and strife, which lasted till the end of their lives. My grandfather had his literary and political work to fill his life, and he rose to ever higher eminence in both. My grandmother had nothing but her grievances to feed upon, and on this diet she could only deteriorate until her mind became completely deranged. Every fresh success of her husband, each new honour which he received, served as a fresh reminder of her own blighted life and provided her with another opportunity of publicly insulting him.

This domestic tragedy was only terminated by death. From my grandfather's life the shadow was never removed. My grandmother outlived her husband by nine years, and carried her grievances to the grave in 1882.

## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY AUTHORSHIP

“He had surrendered his name to men’s tongues, and was a thing that all had the right to praise, to blame, to scrutinise, to spy. He had become an author.”—*Maltravers*.

BULWER-LYTTON is often described as one of the writers of the Victorian era, but, as already indicated, his reputation as an author had been established before Queen Victoria came to the throne. *Pelham*, the novel which first established his position with his contemporaries, was written when the Princess Victoria was only seven years old, and *The Last Days of Pompeii*, by which he is chiefly known to posterity, was published three years before she began her reign. The baronetcy by which his services to literature was rewarded was included in the honours list at the time of her coronation.

Of the ten novels published between 1827 and 1837 *Falkland*, the first, scarcely deserves a mention. It is not truly a novel, but a work of fiction in the form of a collection of letters in a gloomy, sentimental vein, written, as the author himself confessed, “with incredible difficulty and labour,” before he had acquired the facility in writing prose which only came to him by long practice. It was after he had “rid his bosom of this perilous stuff” that he married and was forced into a life of feverish literary activity to earn his living and maintain the expensive establishment which he thought it necessary to provide for his wife. As will be seen from the last chapter, they were years of storm and stress; and the novels written during this

period bear evident signs both of the haste in which they were written and of the extreme agitation of the author's mind.

*Pelham*, the second novel, was the only one of these early works which did not suffer from these conditions. It was completed before the real strain began, and has all the freshness and vivacity of youth. The author said in a preface to a later edition, "For the formation of my story, I studied with no slight attention the great works of my predecessors, and attempted to derive from that study certain rules and canons to serve me as a guide. . . . Whether it answered all the objects it attempted I cannot pretend to say : one at least I imagine that it did answer : I think, above most works, it contributed to put an end to the Satanic mania—to turn the thoughts and ambition of young gentlemen without neckcloths, and young clerks who were sallow, from playing the Corsair, and boasting that they were villains. If, mistaking the irony of *Pelham*, they went to the extreme of emulating the foibles which that hero attributes to himself—those were foibles a thousand times more harmless, and even more manly and noble, than the profession of misanthropy and the mawkish sentimentalities of vice."

In this book the frivolities of contemporary society in London and Paris are described with delightful humour and buoyancy. The political intrigues of party politicians are caricatured without malice. The conversations are witty and entertaining. The hero himself is gay, conceited, debonair, and eschews melodrama. He says of himself, "I have always had a great horror of being a hero in scenes, and a still greater antipathy to females in distress" ; and when tempted to resent an injury, reminds himself that "this would be



neither useful nor dignified—common sense never quarrels with anyone. Never make a scene about anything—reproach and anger always do make a scene.”

There is melodrama in the book, there are “scenes,” violence, crime, even murder, but they are introduced as incidental to, not as part of, the main story, and are only employed as a contrast to the habits and principles of the main character. The subsidiary hero, Reginald Glanville, the passionate, melodramatic, Byronic figure, is expressly drawn as a foil to Pelham, and it is round him that such plot as the book contains is woven.

This novel is the only one the composition of which the author and his young wife might have enjoyed together. The qualities esteemed are those which both could admire. The personalities laughed at were those which both would take pleasure in ridiculing. It was the product of the only happy period in their married life—the first two years spent at Woodcot. If it had not been for the financial straits to which the author was reduced by the withdrawal of his mother’s allowance, the world might have been enriched by more and even better books of the same kind. *Pelham* narrowly escaped being a failure. The reader to whom the MS. was first submitted by the publisher pronounced it worthless, but fortunately it was submitted to another, who gave a more favourable opinion. After publication, it was received by the critics with indifference or abuse, and for two months it seemed destined to perish by neglect. Then it suddenly rose into favour, and became the rage. Everyone talked of it, fashions were changed by it, black evening dress for gentlemen superseded the coloured clothes that had previously been in vogue, and the literary reputation of the author was firmly established.

The next two novels, *The Disowned* and *Devereux*, were very different in character. The author's mind was already overshadowed by the struggle against poverty; he was beginning to see himself as a tragic figure, and the gloomy Glanville *motif* gradually superseded the gay Pelham *motif*. *The Disowned* was the transition between the two. In this book there were two heroes—Clarence Lindon, who had been unjustly disowned by his father, but found an unexpected benefactor in an old gentleman, Mr. Talbot, who adopted him, made him his heir, and gave him the wealth and social position of which his father had deprived him; and Algernon Mordaunt, who had been disinherited by a legal decision, and who in consequence was sunk in abject poverty and despair. Clarence Lindon had much of the gaiety of Pelham, Algernon Mordaunt all the morbidity of Glanville; but whereas in the first book the gloomy character was quite secondary, and only a foil to the gay one, in this book the two characters were equally prominent, and it would be difficult to say which of the two was intended for the hero. Though the scene is laid in the eighteenth century, many of the author's own experiences are introduced, including his sojourn with the gipsies. Among a host of rather shadowy personalities, there are a few good minor characters; but the chief defect of the book is the unsuccessful attempt made in it to embody certain human qualities in living persons. Vanity, ambition, pride, selfish sensuality and philanthropy are all personified in the principal characters of the story, but this necessitates long and tedious disquisitions on their qualities, which retard the action. The plot is not worked out with the skill which the author subsequently acquired, and there is much unnecessary padding in the story.



Unlike *Pelham*, *The Disowned* was immediately popular, but the favour with which it was at first received did not long survive. The chief biographical interest in the book is the fact that the sufferings of Mordaunt so affected Mrs. Bulwer-Lytton that she offered to renew her allowance, but did it with so little sympathy that her son's pride forbade him to accept it.

The period selected for the next novel, *Devereux*, is the reign of Queen Anne, but it is not in fact an historical novel; the characters from history introduced into the book—Bolingbroke, Harley, Pope, Gay, Fielding, the aged Louis XIV, Prior, Kneller, etc.—play no part in the story, and contribute nothing to the unfolding of the plot; they only serve to give colour to the period chosen. The political intrigues and Jacobite plots are also quite incidental; they do not elucidate, but only increase the confusion of that very complicated age. In this book the balance is definitely tipped on the side of melodrama. The *Pelham motif* is only traceable in the hero's uncle, Sir William Devereux, who has a fund of racy stories which the innate kindness of his nature never allows him to finish.

The plot is woven out of the lives of three brothers. The elder of twins is the hero, the favourite and prospective heir of his uncle. The youngest of the three, with a morbidly religious temperament, is poisoned by jealousy, kills his eldest brother's wife, changes his uncle's will by fraud and expiates his crimes as a demented hermit. The hero wrongly suspects his twin brother throughout. The villain of the story is a Jesuit priest who, with the hero's servant as his accomplice, plays on the characters of the three brothers, and makes the youngest the agent of his ambitious intrigues.

The construction of the plot in this book shows an advance on its predecessors, but is far from reaching the skill and ingenuity which the author developed later in his genuine historical novels, or in those which belong to his mature period.

*Paul Clifford*, which followed in quick succession, was the first of what may be called the crime novels—that is, those in which the hero himself was a criminal. There were four of these—*Paul Clifford*, *Eugene Aram*, *Night and Morning* and *Lucretia*. The purpose and treatment of the last three will be dealt with later. In this, the first of the series, the object, as the author himself explained in a preface, was twofold :

“ First to draw attention to two errors in our penal institutions, viz :—a vicious Prison discipline, and a sanguinary Criminal Code,—the habit of corrupting the boy by the very punishment that sought to redeem him, and then hanging the man, at the first occasion, as the easiest way of getting rid of our own blunders. Between the example of crime which the tyro learns from the felons in the prison-yard, and the horrible levity with which the mob gather round the drop at Newgate, there is a connection which a writer may be pardoned for quitting loftier regions of imagination to trace and to detect.

“ A second and a lighter object . . . was to show that there is nothing essentially different between vulgar vice and fashionable vice,—and that the slang of the one circle is but an easy paraphrase of the cant of the other.”

In order that we may appreciate the conditions which the author sought to condemn in this novel, it is necessary to remember that the generation to which he belonged was one in which men and women were hanged for petty thefts, and suicides were buried at the cross-roads with a stake through their bodies ; while the stocks and the pillory were familiar objects in every village. The following single example will

illustrate the standard of civilisation which prevailed at the beginning of the nineteenth century :

A woman named Mary Jones, a native of Cornwall, was the wife of an artisan who had formerly been a sailor. One day her husband was taken by a press-gang and sent back to sea. When he did not return, Mary Jones was in despair. She set out for London on foot with an infant at her breast, in the hope of finding him, or, failing that, a relative who, she thought, would give her shelter. She was disappointed in both respects, and after wandering about the streets for some days, she was reduced to a starving condition. This woman had hitherto been of unblemished character, but driven at last to desperation, she stole from a shop in Ludgate Hill a piece of cotton cloth valued at eight shillings. The cry was raised against her, and the master of the shop ran out in pursuit of the thief. It was stated afterwards that she had already repented of her action and was returning to the shop with the cloth in her hand. She was arrested, brought to trial, found guilty of the theft, and condemned to death. The jury strongly recommended her to mercy on account of her previous good character and the extenuating circumstances. The judge, apparently one who believed that respect for the law can be enforced by the perpetration of injustice in its name, refused to endorse the recommendation of the jury ; and Mary Jones was hanged at Tyburn, her infant being taken from her breast at the foot of the gallows.

This dreadful tragedy was enacted in the year 1818. There were no political considerations in this case to explain the brutality. It was simply a typical case of the administration of justice at that time. Public opinion in such matters was then, as I believe it always will be, in advance of that of the legal authorities. It was the jury that recommended mercy, the judge that refused it, and when some years later Parliament decided to abolish the death penalty for minor offences, it was the then Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon, who protested and declared that the fear of death was a most effectual



preventive of such offences, and that after the experience of half a century he had never known a lawyer or a politician able to point out to him a satisfactory substitute !

Two years after the publication of *Paul Clifford* the Reform Parliament of 1832 swept away most of the harsher provisions of the Penal Code of those days, though the practice of public executions, in spite of Dickens' exposure in *The Times* of the "horrible levity of the crowd" at the execution of the Mannings on November 14th, 1849, continued during almost the whole of Bulwer-Lytton's life, and was only abolished in 1868. It was in the Reform Parliament that Bulwer began his political career, and it contained no more zealous reformer than he was at that time. Since then much progress has been made in penal reform ; that it has not been even greater is largely due to the influence of the Lord Eldons of each generation.

*Paul Clifford* marks a great advance on its two immediate predecessors, both in the development of the plot and in the drawing of character. The heroine, Lucy Brandon, has more flesh and blood than any he had yet produced ; but my grandfather never created a really satisfactory woman character. His heroines are all sweet, innocent, bashful maidens or tender, sentimental, adoring wives, modelled out of the fantasy of his boyish romance at Ealing—the kind of wife he would have liked for himself, but widely different from the ultra-modern, intensely matter-of-fact, scornful beauty whom he had married.

The book shocked the generation which first read it. The gentleman highwayman was new to fiction, and the nineteenth-century public equally resented the virtues ascribed to the criminal and the vices attributed to the lawyer and politician. The dramatic incident of a judge sentencing his

son to death was later utilised by Robert Louis Stevenson in *Weir of Hermiston*. Those who read *Paul Clifford* in search of a good story will find one. Those who scrutinise it for blemishes of style will also discover plenty ; they will find lighting a pipe described as “ applying the Promethean spark to his tube,” a glass of beer as “ a nectarean beverage,” a bedroom as “ somnambular accommodation,” and to amuse as “ to excite the risible muscles.” Such phrases were apparently considered clever at the time they were used. To-day they cause a shudder. It is largely a question of date, for my grandfather could write the purest English when he chose.

All these early works must have been written at great speed, some of them even overlapping. *Pelham* and *The Disowned* were both published in 1828, *Devereux* in 1829 and *Paul Clifford* in 1830. It was two years before the next novel appeared, but there was no slackening in the author’s activities. In 1831 he published a long poem, *The Siamese Twins*, became editor of *The New Monthly*, and was elected to Parliament at the end of April. All his novels bear evidence of wide and serious reading, and it is difficult to see how this could have been crowded into the busy life he was now leading as author, journalist and Member of Parliament. *The Pilgrims of the Rhine* was the next book to be written. It was completed by the end of 1832, but its publication was delayed till 1834. It is a tale of travel and a collection of short stories rather than a novel, and does not call for examination here. Meanwhile he was engaged in writing two other books simultaneously, *Eugene Aram*, the second of the crime novels, which was published in 1832, and *Godolphin*, which appeared anonymously the following year.

*Eugene Aram* was not directed against any social evils crying out for reform, as was *Paul Clifford*, nor does the murder of which Aram was found guilty form any part of the story. The crime itself had been committed before the book begins ; and the novel, which has no other purpose than the study of a rare anomaly in human nature, deals only with the life, habits, thought and conduct of Aram in the fourteen years which intervened between his crime and his arrest. It is a dramatic story of the consequences of a deed "at war with a whole life—blasting, indeed, for ever the happiness ; but making little revolution in the pursuits and disposition of the character."

The character of Eugene Aram, and the circumstances of his trial, which were widely discussed at the time and have been the subject of much study ever since, had a special interest for Bulwer, as the scholar had been a friend of his paternal grandfather, and had actually been employed as a tutor to his family at Heydon. In treating the subject he sought to heighten the drama and deepen the tragedy by making the victim of the crime a brother of Mr. Lester, Aram's best friend in after years, and his arrest the result of a denunciation by the murdered man's son, and his own rival in love, on the day of his marriage to Madeleine Lester. The book, though condemned by the critics, was at once accepted by the public, and remains to this day one of the author's best-known works.

*Godolphin*, the companion novel, was not so successful. Though free from the literary blemishes of *Paul Clifford*, it has less interest as a story than any of its predecessors. It is a record of disillusionment, disappointment and failure. It contained two new features which constitute its only interest—the appearance for the first time, in the character of the



astrologer, Voltkman, of the mystic element which was later made the chief feature of *Zanoni* and *A Strange Story*, and the attempt to create a new type of heroine. Constance Vernon is represented as a hard, ambitious, politically-minded, scheming woman ; but in this rôle she is not at all convincing, and rather leaves on the reader the impression of being a typical Bulwer-Lytton heroine in an inadequate disguise. There is little plot in the story ; and as all the characters are represented as dissatisfied with life, its general effect is depressing.

These two books are the best-written of the early works, and reading them without knowing their dates one would place them much later in the author's lifetime.

As already related in the last chapter, the terrific strain imposed upon Bulwer by his literary and political activities at this time led to a complete breakdown in 1833, and he and his wife went to Italy for rest and change. The literary results of this journey afford a striking example of the author's creative genius. In a letter to his son in later life, he wrote, "The great thing in the voyage of life is to stop very often to take in coals—to get a complete stock of new ideas, and one can only get that by new studies or pursuits." This brief holiday, which only lasted a few months, was utilised in "taking in coals," with the result that Bulwer on his return emerged with "a complete stock of new ideas," and established a fresh reputation as the author of thrilling historical novels. On arrival at Rome he became engrossed in a study of the historical associations of that unique city, and at once began to sketch out his novel of *Rienzi*. Passing on to Naples, he found new food for research, and conceived the plan of bringing back to life the buried civilisation of Pompeii. The journey was hurriedly brought to an end,

but after his return the two new works were completed. *The Last Days of Pompeii* appeared first in 1834, and *Rienzi* followed in 1835.

These two books exemplified another confession made later in life by my grandfather in an essay, entitled "The Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination." In this essay he writes, "I am not sure that I could not describe the things I imagine more exactly than the things I habitually see. I am not sure that I could not give a more truthful picture of the Nile, which I have never beheld except in my dreams, than I could of the little lake at the bottom of my own park, on the banks of which I loitered out my schoolboy holidays, and (could I but hallow their turf as Christian burial-ground) I would desire to choose my grave." This was strikingly true. Bulwer could not in fact describe accurately the things which he habitually saw. He endowed them with a romance created by his imagination, and represented them not as they were but as his romantic mind conceived them to be. That is why his scenes of contemporary society are so unreal. He is like those who write books of school-life and represent it as emotional, exciting, eventful, whereas in reality it is the most matter-of-fact, prosaic and uneventful existence imaginable. When, however, he was able to give free vent to his imagination in describing the events and characters of past history, in re-creating the mediæval life of Rome, re-peopling the buried streets of Pompeii, or projecting us into the future with metaphysical studies of occult powers as yet barely discernible by science, but presented by the clairvoyance of his imagination as fully developed and actively employed, he at least creates an impression of accuracy and reality which no experience can challenge.

In the character and meteoric career of Nicola Rienzi

Gabrini, Bulwer found an ideal hero. History can hardly provide a more romantic figure than this plebeian—the son of an innkeeper and a washerwoman—who by his eloquence and intellect rose to supreme power in the Rome of 1347, founded his “good estate,” quelled the turbulence of the rival barons—the Colonna, the Orsini and the Savelli—suppressed brigandage in the countryside, established wise and just laws in the city, dictated terms to kings and Emperor, was the idol of the common people for a few months, till, excommunicated by the Pope whom he had sought to serve, and whose return from Avignon to Rome had been the principal object of his reforms, he was driven into exile ; then, after seven years of wanderings and imprisonment, was sent back in triumph to Rome as the emissary of that Pope’s successor ; and finally fell a victim to the fury of the very mob which had first raised him to power. Even Gibbon’s cold and majestic language awarded him this tribute : “ Never perhaps has the energy and effect of a single mind been more remarkably felt than in the sudden, though transient, reformation of Rome by the tribune Rienzi.”

From such material it was easy for Bulwer’s vivid imagination and exuberant language to fashion a glowing romance which thrilled the young ladies of the nineteenth century, accustomed to *The Book of Beauty* and the other popular annuals of the day. Algernon Mordaunt, Paul Clifford, Godolphin and Eugene Aram paled into insignificance beside this dazzling and romantic hero who combined all the knightly qualities of the fourteenth century with the political principles of the nineteenth-century reformers, and *Rienzi* remained the most popular of Bulwer’s novels throughout his lifetime.



The story of Pompeii provided no such exceptional personality, but supplied an historical catastrophe of nature almost equally unparalleled, which in a few hours had completely annihilated a whole community in the full tide of its active and luxurious existence, and buried their city beneath many feet of lava and ashes, where it lay entombed for seventeen centuries, when it was again revealed to the wondering gaze of people from all parts of the world, with its buildings almost intact, and its citizens in the very positions they had occupied at the moment of their extinction. Here, too, was romantic material of which Bulwer made the fullest use. The characters in this story were less historical than those in *Reinzi*; they were rather types which the author clothed with individual characteristics—Sallust, the epicure, and Pansa, the magistrate; Arbaces, the wicked and crafty Egyptian, and Calenus, the priest of the temple of Isis; the two Greek lovers, Glaucus and Ione; Diomed, the rich merchant, and Julia his daughter; Apoccides, brother of Ione, the Christian convert; Olinthus and his fellow-Christians; the gladiators, and—perhaps the best of all the author's woman characters—Nidia, the blind flower-girl who, when the catastrophe occurred, was alone able to find her way unaided through a darkness which was no impediment to her.

Two human skulls, unearthed at Pompeii, are still preserved at Knebworth. They were presented to my grandfather in 1859 by his friend, John Auldjo, accompanied by a letter, in which he wrote: "All that has been gathered into Noel House has been sold, but I have saved those things I valued or had affection for—among them the skull of Arbaces the Egyptian and that of Calenus from Pompeii. I long had determined that if ever the Noel House collection

should be broken up, these relics of 'The Last Days of Pompeii' should be yours as perhaps the only one beside myself who would fully appreciate them. I now have the opportunity of carrying out that intention and make them a present to you. I know they will be taken care of and probably remain undisturbed for ages at Knebworth, where perhaps they may be found by Macaulay's New Zealander when Knebworth will be visited as one of the shrines of England."

As an illustration of the reputation which this book immediately established, and has to some extent retained ever since, I may mention that when I visited Pompeii in 1927 I was told by my Italian guide that "Gli Ultimi Giorni di Pompeii" was still the best text-book available, and when I said that I was the author's grandson he immediately uncovered, bowed, and addressing me as "Mr. Bulwer," treated me all day with a deference which could not have been more marked had I been Mussolini himself!

With the publication of these two books Bulwer reached the peak of his literary reputation, and though he wrote more and better books later, it is as the author of *Pelham*, *Eugene Aram*, *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Rienzi* that he was chiefly known to his contemporaries and is chiefly judged by posterity.

There we may leave him for the present, while we pick up some of the other threads of his many-sided life.

## CHAPTER V

### POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

"Few, who at ease their members' speeches read,  
Guess the hard life of members who succeed."

*St. Stephens.*

EDWARD BULWER entered Parliament as Member for St. Ives in May 1831. The country was at that time in a ferment over the Reform Bill, introduced by the Whigs and opposed by the Tories. Bulwer had been elected as a supporter of the Bill. He made his maiden speech in favour of it and wrote a description of the scene in the House of Commons on the night when it was passed by a majority of 109. After its rejection by the Lords, a General Election and finally a promise by the King to create a sufficient number of Peers to ensure its passage, the Bill was accepted by the Lords, and received the Royal Assent on June 7th, 1832.

Bulwer's constituency, St. Ives, was one of those which were swept away by the Reform Act, and he selected in place of it the constituency of Lincoln, because the Liberal electors who invited him to stand were, like himself, opposed to the repeal of the Corn Laws. He retained this seat till 1841, when he resigned rather than support Sir Robert Peel on this question. Though he attended the House of Commons regularly and spoke occasionally, there are only two outstanding successes of his first parliamentary period which need to be mentioned in this short biography: the first was his pamphlet, entitled *Letter to a Late Cabinet*



*Minister on the Present Crisis*, in 1834 ; and the second his speech, the last he made as Member for Lincoln, on a resolution for the immediate abolition of negro apprenticeship in 1838.

The " crisis " of 1834 arose in this way. The Whig Government was beginning to lose some of the popularity which it had acquired with the Liberal section of the public by the passage of the Reform Bill. Lord Melbourne had succeeded Lord Grey as Prime Minister, and was considered to be too lukewarm in the cause of reform. It had been hoped by this section that the Parliament elected under the new franchise would have set to work with zeal to remedy some of the many social injustices of the day. Melbourne they considered intellectually lazy, his colleagues they felt to be indifferent, caring more for their own social position than for the good of the people. On the other hand, the Conservative section still hated them for the high-handed way in which they had coerced the House of Lords. Lord Melbourne's Government was thus being criticised on all sides ; and the King, longing to be avenged on the men who had made him consent to a possible use of the Royal Prerogative to pass their Bill, and mistaking the unpopularity of the Ministers for a popular reaction against Reform, was eagerly awaiting an opportunity to get rid of them. He believed such an occasion was afforded by the death of Lord Spencer, and the consequent transference to the House of Lords of his son, Lord Althorp, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. Accordingly, in November 1834, he informed Lord Melbourne that his Ministers no longer enjoyed his confidence. The Government resigned. The Duke of Wellington took over all the offices of State into his own hands, and advised

the King to summon Sir Robert Peel, who was then in Rome, to return at once and form an Administration.

Bulwer was in Ireland when this crisis occurred. He returned at once to London and found the political situation being excitedly discussed. He himself belonged to the group of Liberals who were dissatisfied with the reforming zeal of the Melbourne Cabinet, but he and his friends realised that a Government formed by Sir Robert Peel, who might attract some genuine reformers, would be a bad substitute. The all-important thing was to secure the return of the Whig party at the General Election, which was bound to follow the prorogation of Parliament. To secure this result he set to work at once to write a pamphlet, which he called *Letter to a Late Cabinet Minister on the Present Crisis*. It was completed in two days, and published by Messrs. Saunders and Otley on November 21st, 1834. It had an immediate and phenomenal success—twenty-one editions of it were sold in six weeks. It was quoted at length in all the provincial papers, and was made the basis of most of the speeches and addresses of the Whig candidates during the General Election which followed in December. It sold in an expensive form nearly 30,000 copies in six weeks, and about 60,000 more in a cheap form afterwards. Its interest was entirely ephemeral, and its success resulted from the promptitude with which it was written and the completeness with which it met the requirements of the situation.

Sir Robert Peel returned to England on December 21st and undertook the task of forming an Administration. Parliament was immediately dissolved, and in the General Election which followed, the Whigs retained a sufficient number of seats to give them a majority in the House of Commons. Writing to his friend, John Forster, on January



18th, 1841, Bulwer said, "More than twelve Members in the Peel Parliament told me they owed their seats to my pamphlet. If this be true, but for that pamphlet the Tories would have gained the majority and the Liberal Party would now be in opposition."

The pamphlet can be read in full in his published works, but one extract may be quoted here to illustrate the nature of the literary effort by which so conspicuous a political result was achieved.

Having explained the nature of the crisis, he proceeds to give the following satirical and amusing account of the circumstance which actually precipitated it :

"Supposing then the King, from such evident reasons, to have resolved to get rid of his Ministers at the first opportunity—suddenly Lord Spencer dies, and the opportunity is afforded. There might have been a better one. Throughout the whole history of England, since the principles of a constitutional Government, and of a responsible administration, were established in 1688, there is no parallel to the combination of circumstances attendant upon the present change. A parallel to a part of the case there may be ; to the whole case, there is none. The Cabinet assure the King of their power and willingness to carry on the government ; the House of Commons, but recently elected, supports that Cabinet by the most decided majorities ; the Premier, not forced on the King by a party, but solicited by himself to accept office ; a time of profound repose ; no resignation tendered, no defeat incurred—the revenue increasing—quiet at home—peace abroad ; the political atmosphere perfectly serene :—when lo, there dies a very old man, whose death everyone has been long foreseeing—not a minister, but the father of a minister, which removes, not the Premier, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer, from the House of Commons to the House of Lords ! An event so long anticipated, does not confound the Cabinet. The Premier is not aghast, he cannot be taken by surprise by an event so natural and so anticipated (for very old men *will* die !) ; he is provided



with names to fill up the vacant posts of Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House of Commons. He both feels and declares himself equally strong as ever ; he submits his new appointments to His Majesty. Let me imagine the reply. The King, we are informed by the new ministerial organs, expresses the utmost satisfaction at Lord Melbourne and his Government : he considers him the most honourable of men, and among the wisest of statesmen. Addressing him, then, after this fashion :

He does not affect to dissemble his love,  
And *therefore* he kicks him downstairs.

“ ‘ MY LORD—You are an excellent man, very—but old Lord Spencer—he was a man seventy-six years old ; no one could suppose that at that age, an Earl would die ! You are an admirable minister, I am pleased with your measures ; but old Lord Spencer is no more. It is a sudden, an unforeseen event. Who could imagine he would only live to seventy-six ? The revenue is prospering, the Cabinet is strong—our allies are faithful, you have the House of Commons at your back, but alas ! Lord Spencer is dead ! You cannot doubt my attachment to Reform, but of course it depended on the life of Lord Spencer ! You have lost a Chancellor of the Exchequer ; you say you can supply his place—but who can supply the place of the late Lord Spencer ? You have lost a leader of the House of Commons ; you have found another on whom you can depend ; but, my Lord, where shall we find another Earl Spencer, so aged, and so important as the Earl who is gone ! The life of the government, you are perfectly aware, was an annuity on the life of this unfortunate nobleman—he was only seventy-six ! my love of liberal men, and liberal measures, is exceeding, and it was bound by the strongest tie,—the life of the late Lord Spencer. How can my people want Reform, now Lord Spencer is dead ? How can I support reforming ministers, when Lord Spencer has ceased to be ? The Duke of Wellington, you must be perfectly aware, is the only man to govern the country, which has just lost the owner of so fine a library, and so large an estate. It is true that his Grace could not govern it before, but then Lord Spencer was in the way ! The untimely decease of that nobleman has altered the whole

face of affairs. The people were not quite contented with the Whigs, because they did not go far enough, but then—Lord Spencer was alive ! The people now will be satisfied with the Tories, because they do not go so far, for—Lord Spencer is dead ! A Tory ministry is necessary, it cannot get on without a Tory Parliament ; and a Tory Parliament cannot be chosen without a Tory people. But, Ministry, Parliament, and people, what can they be but Tory, after so awful a dispensation of Providence as the death of Earl Spencer ? My Lord, excuse my tears, and do me the favour to take this letter to the Duke of Wellington.’ ”

As the author of this effective pamphlet, Bulwer was again returned for Lincoln with a large majority. His services to the party were gratefully acknowledged by the Whig leaders ; Lord Melbourne offered him a minor post in the new Government, which was formed after Peel’s resignation in the following April. He now found himself called upon to make a definite decision between literature and politics. He chose the former. Lord Melbourne’s offer was declined ; and the profession in which he had already made a high reputation, and on the earnings from which he was entirely dependent, was resumed.

Bulwer at that time was a Liberal in politics, but as he was not admitted into the innermost circles of the Whig aristocracy, he was not a strong party-man. He was now in sympathy with a small group of philosophical Radicals who looked to Lord Durham as their leader. He seldom spoke in the House, but his rare speeches were listened to with interest and commanded respect. One of the subjects which he repeatedly urged upon the Government was the abolition of the stamp duty on newspapers, which he described as “ a tax upon knowledge.” In 1835 Lord Melbourne expressed to him “ the hope and indeed con-



fidence that the state of the revenue would enable us to settle this question next session " ; but in fact another twenty years had to elapse before this objectionable tax was repealed.

The appointment of Lord Durham as British Ambassador at St. Petersburg in the same year removed the leader whom he most willingly followed, and with whom he had discussed the desirability of forming a new party pledged to prosecute with vigour a policy of political reform. With the departure of Lord Durham, Bulwer's interest in the House of Commons diminished, and he preferred to ventilate his political opinions by his pen, rather than by speeches in Parliament. His last speech in the House as a Liberal Member was, however, the occasion of his greatest oratorical triumph. It was delivered in support of a motion for the immediate abolition of the last remnants of slavery in the British Colonies.

Slavery in the West Indian Colonies had been abolished in 1833, but it was then enacted that for a period of twelve years the emancipated slaves should work as apprentices with the rights of free men. This apprenticeship system had not proved satisfactory, and during the five years in which it was in operation the condition of the apprenticed negroes was little better than it had been previously when they were complete slaves. Accordingly, in May 1838, a resolution was submitted to the House of Commons by Sir Eardley Wilmot for the immediate abolition of negro apprenticeship.

Bulwer spoke at the end of the debate, in support of the resolution :

" I assert," he said, " that with the planter we have kept faith ; that there was no adulteration, no paring and filching of the gold we received ; perfect it was in tale and weight. You have kept faith with the planter ; but I tell you with



whom it is you ask us to break faith—with the thousands and tens of thousands whom you mocked with the name of free—with the majesty of the Imperial Parliament, whose acts have been trampled under foot—with the people of England who paid their millions, not to abolish the name slavery, but the thing slavery. You ask us to break faith with justice, with humanity, with Heaven itself, in order that you may keep faith with Mammon. . . . Can you tell us fairly and boldly that this apprenticeship has been that mild and hopeful interval between slavery and freedom which you contemplated when the Act was proposed? Can you tell us, that if we had possessed the gift of prophecy, and foreseen with what records these Parliamentary documents were to be filled—can you tell us, that one man in this House would have dared to insult the English people with the proposition of purchasing such a system at such a cost? . . . Yes, to us compensation is indeed due; but if to us, how much more to the negro! No, not to *him*—the very magnitude of his wrongs denies even the possibility of compensation. No gold can buy back to him the agonised years already wasted since that act of mockery was past; no gold can buy back human life itself! . . . No! we cannot demand compensation for the negro—we cannot call back the past. But justice and sympathy for the future—*these* at least are in our power! . . . Depend upon it, all attempts to relax and mitigate slavery are hopeless and absurd. There are no ways of patching up the everlasting distinction between slavery and freedom; all that you can do is to diminish the interest of the planter in the health and life of the negro, and leave the wretch more exposed to the jealousy, because more obnoxious to the fears, of the tyrant. I cannot understand this one-sided niceness of conscience, this terror of violating by a hair's breadth your compact with a planter, and this deaf and blind indifference to the equal obligations due to the other parties of the compact, the negroes and the people of these realms.”

The speech concluded with these words :

“I accuse not the planters; I accuse the system; men are but the tools of the circumstances that surround them. Where tyranny is made legal, I execrate the tyranny, but I acquit the

tyrant. You have heard from me no individual cases, branding individual persons—you have heard from me no doubtful references to anonymous authorities. My charge is against communities, not persons—my facts are in the books you appeal to as undeniable records. If the despatches of your governors, if the reports of your magistrates, if this whole mass of parliamentary evidence be not one lie—I tell you that your arguments against this motion are shivered to the dust ! I have proved that not individuals, not minorities, but (where legislative assemblies exist in your colonies) whole communities have been, from first to last, invaders of your law, violators of your compact. I have proved that faith is due, not to the planters, but to their victims and their dupes. I have proved that there is no danger in the course we recommend—proved it by reference to actual experience in Antigua, to the assertions of your governor in Jamaica, where all parties would abandon the system for compensation—proved it by your own recommendations to the colonies. Answer all this if you can ; if you answer it to your satisfaction, you belie your governors, you impeach your witnesses, you condemn yourselves. Year after year, and session after session, we debate on the mere forms and ceremonials of our religion, whether this oath may be abolished—whether this distinction may be removed—whether by one law or by another we can best preserve the husk and shell of religion—its ecclesiastical establishment. I honour all men's consciences upon these points ; but here we come to the fountain of Christianity itself—its all-protecting brotherhood, its all-embracing love. When scholars and divines have summed up the blessings that our common creed has conferred upon mankind, first and foremost of those blessings they have placed the abolition of that slavery which stained and darkened the institutions of the Pagan world. I know of no Pagan slavery worse than this Christian apprenticeship. Here, then, we fight again the same battle as our first fathers, the primitive Christians, from whom all our sects and divisions have emerged. Here is a ground upon which Catholic and Protestant, and the wide families of Dissent, all may unite ; and I do believe that he who votes against this dark hypocrisy of slavery in disguise will obtain something better than the approval of constituents



—something holier than the gratification of party triumph and political ambition—in the applause of his own conscience, and in those blessings that will not rise the less to the Eternal Throne because they are uttered by the victims of human avarice and pride.”

This speech was afterwards described by O’Connell as one of the best speeches he had ever heard in the House of Commons. He had himself intended to speak, but when Bulwer sat down, he tore up his notes and cried out : “ The case is made out—there is nothing to add—divide ! ”

The division followed immediately, and the resolution was carried by 96 to 93. Three members afterwards assured Bulwer that they had intended to vote against the resolution, but had been converted by his speech.

Bulwer resigned his seat as Member for Lincoln in 1841. He remained out of Parliament for eleven years, and when he returned to the House it was with a new name and in a different political party.

The years of his absence from the House of Commons gradually brought about a change in my grandfather’s political allegiance. His mother had died in 1843 ; he had succeeded to her property at Knebworth and added her name to his own. Most of his time, when not travelling abroad, was spent in his country home, reading, writing and carrying out extensive additions to the house and gardens. He had no strong party ties, and was able to give a completely detached study to the political issues which were being fought out both in his own country and on the continent of Europe. It was a time of considerable political ferment. Revolutions took place and were suppressed in most European countries. New nations were in the throes of birth.



A comparison between the views expressed in *England and the English*, written at the age of thirty, and those expressed in *The Parisians*, his last novel, shows clearly that my grandfather's political opinions underwent little variation throughout his life. When he changed his party it was because the new one seemed to express those opinions better than the old. Two circumstances contributed more than any others to his political conversion. He had broken with the Liberals on the subject of the repeal of the Corn Laws and the extreme *laissez faire* doctrines of the Manchester or Cobdenite school were anathema to him. The industrial revolution had brought into being a new power in the State—that of the middle-class manufacturers who owed all their wealth and prosperity to Free Trade at a time when Great Britain was the leading manufacturing State of the world. All the sympathies which had made my grandfather an ardent reformer in his young days were now in revolt against the selfishness of this new commercial school, which cared nothing for the sufferings of the working population that produced their wealth, and which opposed all attempts of the State to intervene for their protection. “A Republic is cheap,” he wrote to his friend, John Forster, in 1848, “but if ever that hour arrives it shall not be, if I and a few like me live, a Republic of millers and cotton spinners, but either a Republic of gentlemen or a Republic of workmen—either is better than those wretched money spiders, who would sell England for 1s. 6d.”

The other circumstance that influenced his opinions was his friendship with Disraeli. This friendship had first begun on a literary footing. Later they were drawn together in opposing the repeal of the Corn Laws. They gradually became close political friends, and remained so till separated

by death. Disraeli's Tory Democracy suited Bulwer-Lytton's Liberalism better than the *laissez faire* doctrines of the Liberal party, and it provided the bridge by which he passed into the ranks of the Conservatives.

His political conversion was first publicly announced in a pamphlet which he published in 1851 under the title of *Letters to John Bull*. As a result of this publication, which ran into ten editions, he received an invitation to represent his own county in Parliament. At the General Election of 1852 he was returned as Conservative Member for Hertfordshire, and continued to represent this constituency until his elevation to the Peerage in 1866.

When Bulwer-Lytton re-entered Parliament his party was in office, but not in power, the General Election having left them in a small minority. Before the end of the year they were again in opposition. Bulwer-Lytton took an active part in the debates and spoke frequently. He was now regarded as one of the principal orators of the day. When during the Crimean War in 1855 Lord Aberdeen's Government was defeated and resigned, Lord Derby, the Conservative leader, declined the responsibility of forming a Government, but announced in the House of Lords that, had he done so, he would have received in a high office, and would have been proud to have received "the support and assistance of the unrivalled eloquence and commanding talents of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton." When three years later he became Prime Minister, in a minority Government, Lord Derby included Bulwer-Lytton in his Cabinet as Secretary of State for the Colonies. This office he held till the defeat of Lord Derby's Government in the following year.

During that year he spoke on the Reform Bill, and Lord

Palmerston told Queen Victoria that this speech was the best he had ever heard in the House of Commons. It is thus described by Mr. William White in his *Inner Life of the House of Commons* :

“ When the Colonial Secretary rose to deliver his views on the subject of Reform, we knew we might anticipate one of his ‘ great orations.’ . . . When Sir Edward has made up his mind to speak he is restless, uneasy, and wanders about the House and the lobby with his hands in his pockets and his eyes upon the ground. . . . Sir Edward’s speech is said to have been a grand oration. Nay, one enthusiastic member declared that it was one of the grandest orations that have ever been delivered in the House of Commons.”

Mr. White goes on to complain that the speech was very inaudible in the gallery and that therefore he could not judge fairly of its merits, but he concludes by saying :

“ Members down below must have heard Sir Edward better, for they cheered vociferously. Indeed, at the close of this remarkable harangue, the cheering was beyond anything we ever heard in the House, or indeed elsewhere. It was literally a ‘ tempest of applause ’ and seemed to us to come from all parts of the House. It burst forth as the orator sat down, like a hurricane, was renewed and re-renewed, and then, when it seemed to have died out, was started again, and once more the whole House appeared to join in the chorus. A proud man was Sir Edward that night as members came up to congratulate him on his success, and probably he went home and dreamed, either waking or sleeping, that he had received a great parliamentary name, and that future historians will say of him that, in addition to being a most successful novelist, he was one of the greatest orators of his time.”

Then follows this strange comment :

“ Well, perhaps they may, and with truth ; but that to our mind is not saying much. It is only saying that he is one of the ‘ Tritons of the Minnows,’ for every great debate which we



hear only still further confirms the opinion which we have often uttered in these columns, that though we have many eloquent and effective speakers, we have no great orators."

Is not this an illustration of the inability of each generation to appreciate its own contemporaries? This was a House of Commons which listened to Gladstone and John Bright, two of the greatest orators of any time. Truly to be acknowledged a Triton among such minnows was a reputation of which any man might well be proud.

With his retirement from office, Bulwer-Lytton's political career came to an end. Though he never lost his interest in politics, he took little active part in the business of the House. The rest of his life was devoted to literature, and to his literary work we must now return.

## CHAPTER VI

### DRAMATIC AUTHORSHIP

“There is that in theatrical representation which perpetually awakens whatever romance belongs to our character.”—*Godolphin*.

**B**EFORE considering the novels which were written during the interval when Bulwer-Lytton was out of Parliament, I must give some consideration to another of his many activities which belongs to the period of his life which I had reached in Chapter IV.

On October 31st, 1834, at a dinner party given by one of his friends, Bulwer met for the first time Mr. Macready, the actor, who with Helen Faucit was drawing large audiences to Covent Garden at that time. A close friendship was established between author and actor, and during the next four years novel-writing was suspended in favour of plays, which Bulwer wrote and Macready acted. At their first meeting Macready asked the young novelist if he had ever tried his hand at play-writing and urged him to apply his talents in this direction. Bulwer admitted that he had in fact written a play on the subject of Cromwell, but had mislaid the greater part of the MS. Encouraged by Macready, he decided to explore this new department of literature. The first step was to look up his early attempt in this line and complete it. *Cromwell* was finished in due course and submitted to Macready, who did not like it. After making many corrections to meet the actor's criticisms, Bulwer finally abandoned it as unsuited for the stage. The play was printed, but never published. In later years his

son showed it to Sir Henry Irving, whose opinion apparently coincided with Macready's, for it was not produced.

Eighteen months later author and actor met again, and Bulwer submitted another play which he had written in the meantime. He had dedicated it to Macready, who was "affected to tears" and unable to read the terms of the dedication. He took the play away with him, and this time he was either sufficiently satisfied with it or felt that he could not refuse what had been so cordially dedicated to himself. He undertook to produce it, and the rest of the year was spent in discussing terms, amending the text, and rehearsing it.

This play, *The Duchess de la Vallière*, was a five-act drama in blank verse. The scene was laid in France early in the reign of Louis XIV. The heroine, Louise, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, is loved by a knightly soldier, Monsieur de Bragelone, to whom she had been betrothed in childhood. She rejects his suit and goes to Court, where the young King falls in love with her and makes her a Duchess. She returns his love, but refuses to become his mistress. The King prefers Madame de Montespan, who has no such scruples, and Louise enters a convent. Bragelone, returning from the wars and hearing that Louise is the King's mistress, becomes a monk. They meet at last, only to separate.

It was not a play that Macready could have enjoyed acting, for he had little scope as the rejected lover or the reproachful monk. The part of Louis XIV, though he was not the hero, was almost the more important of the two, and the heroine who loved so dispassionately was not effective on the stage.

The play was first performed on January 4th, 1837, having been published in the autumn of the previous year. Macready



wrote in his diary that he "acted Bragelone well, with earnestness and freshness," and the audience received it with applause. The verdict of the audience on the first night was, however, not upheld by later ones, and after a few performances it was withdrawn.

Disraeli expressed his sympathy in a characteristic letter to Lady Blessington. He wrote: "I am sorry about B's play. I would not write to him, as I detest sympathy, save with good fortune; but I am sorry, very, and for several reasons—1st, because he is my friend; 2ndly, because he is the only literary man whom I do not abominate and despise; 3rdly, because I have no jealousy on principle (not from feeling,) since I think always the more the merrier, and his success would probably have assisted mine; 4thly, because it proves the public taste lower even than I imagined it, if indeed, there can be a deeper still than my estimate; 5thly, because from the extracts which have met my eye (in the *Examiner*) the play seems excellent, and far the best *poeshie* that he has yet relieved himself of; 6thly, because there seems to have been a vast deal of disgusting cant upon the occasion; 7thly, because he is a good fellow, and 8thly—I forget the eighth argument, but it was a very strong one. . . . As for myself, I have locked up my melodrama in the same strong box with my love-letters; both being productions only interesting to the writer."

Nothing could have been more discouraging to a would-be dramatist than to have his first play rejected by the actor, and his second rejected by the audience. But my grandfather was always stimulated rather than discouraged by failure; this characteristic was perhaps the chief of the factors which led to his ultimate success. Instead of resigning himself to the idea that he was not fitted to write plays for the stage,

he at once set to work to write another, which he had finished by the end of the year. But believing, as he did throughout his life, that adverse criticisms were due to the hostility of his critics to himself, rather than to his works, he determined this time that it should be produced anonymously.

Macready had now taken over the management of Covent Garden Theatre, and it was announced that on February 15th, 1838, he would appear for the first time in a new play called *The Lady of Lyons*, by an unknown author. That evening the author was speaking in the House of Commons in favour of a Bill to establish the secret ballot at Elections. As soon as he had finished his speech, he proceeded to the theatre to learn how the play had been received. On the way, he met a fellow-member, Sarjeant Talfourd, who was returning from Covent Garden. Bulwer asked anxiously how the play was going. "Oh, very well indeed for that sort of thing," was the reply. This was not very encouraging. The author with gloomy forebodings hurried on. He reached the theatre and made his way to Lady Blessington's box, just in time to see the last act. At the fall of the curtain there was hearty applause and loud cries of "Author," but no author appeared. Lady Blessington turned to Bulwer in great emotion, and asked, "What do you think of it?" "Oh, it's good enough—for that sort of thing," he replied. Lady Blessington was shocked, and said, "That's the first time I have known you jealous. The author certainly owes a great deal to you, but it is a work of genius!"

Bulwer again chose France for the scene of this play, and the days of the Directory for its period. The choice was dictated by the belief that in the early days of the first French Republic the incidents of the play were most capable



of realisation—the breaking down of class barriers, a career open to any man of talent, the possibility of one of humble birth making a reputation and a fortune in the space of two and a half years. The play is a comedy rather than a melodrama, the lighter parts being written in prose, and the more sentimental passages in verse ; the former are the better of the two. The Deschappelles, a rich merchant family of Lyons, desire for their beautiful daughter, Pauline, a marriage with one of high rank. M. Beauséant, wealthy, and with the rank of a Marquis before the Revolution, is rejected as not good enough—so also is his friend, M. Glavis. Hearing that Claude Melnotte, the son of a gardener but the pride of the village people, who because of his education and attainments have called him “ Prince,” is in love with Pauline, the rejected suitors plan their revenge by introducing the low-born peasant as the “ Prince of Como.” Melnotte, who is piqued by the scornful return of his verses, addressed to Pauline under his own name, agrees to the plan, and swears not to reveal his identity until after his wedding. The “ Prince of Como ” is well received by the Deschappelles, and Pauline willingly accepts him. The marriage takes place, and when the fraud is revealed, the humiliated wife upbraids her deceiver with a pretty scorn, but her heart does not wholly agree with her tongue. All this is good comedy—then the story becomes more serious. Melnotte, contrite and heartbroken, goes off to the wars for two and a half years. Pauline is left humbled and sad, but realises that she loves her absent husband. Her parents lose their money, and Pauline’s marriage with Beauséant can alone save them from bankruptcy and disgrace. Melnotte returns in the nick of time to pay the debts and save Pauline ; so all ends well.

This time the play was a complete success. In the part



of Claude Melnotte, Macready found full scope for his powers, and the play held the stage for many years.

Equally successful was the next play with which, at his request, Bulwer supplied Macready in the following year. This time it was an historical drama on the grand scale, the central figure being Cardinal Richelieu. It is written in blank verse throughout. The plot is woven out of the intrigues of the Duke of Orleans and others to destroy Richelieu, and the Cardinal's measures to circumvent his enemies and save France. Everything turns on the possession of a certain document which contains written evidence of the conspiracy, and this does not get into Richelieu's hands till the last moment. At first his enemies look like succeeding ; the King is deceived, the Cardinal deposed ; but finally the possession of the precious document turns the tables and Richelieu triumphs.

*The Sea Captain*, which followed in 1839, need not be mentioned here. Though it ran at the Haymarket for some weeks, it pleased neither the actor nor the author. Bulwer wished to alter it, but Macready preferred a new play. This was forthcoming by the autumn of 1840 in the form of a light prose comedy, with the title of *Money*, and proved the most successful, as well as the last, which Bulwer wrote for his actor friend. It was produced at the Haymarket on December 8th, 1840, and continued to run until the end of Macready's engagement at that theatre in the following year.

In this comedy the hero, Alfred Evelyn, is disregarded and slighted because he is poor. He loves his cousin, Clara Douglas, who returns his love, but when he proposes to her, she rejects him, because she, too, is poor. "A marriage of privation—of penury—of days that dread the morrow !" she says. "I have seen such a lot ! Never return to this

again." Then he is left a fortune by a distant relative, and everyone now fawns upon and flatters him—except his beloved Clara, who is too proud to show her affection now that he is rich—"too proud," parents of what innumerable tragedies in human lives are those two words! Finally he pretends to lose all his money by gambling, and at once his unreal friends desert him and his true ones stick to him. The lovers are reconciled, and all the right couples are duly paired off.

*Money* is the most durable of all Bulwer's plays. It has many good character parts which, if well acted, would entertain audiences at any date. Both the reading of the will in the first act and the club scene in the third act are good comedy which would stand revival. When as an undergraduate I acted the part of Alfred Evelyn at the Cambridge A.D.C., the play went well, because though Evelyn is a prig, he is something more, and represents not only the power of money in every age, but also the fact that money is the touchstone which distinguishes between the true and the false in human relations. Clara Douglas was a much more difficult part, indeed for a male undergraduate it was an impossible one. Never shall I forget how I drove my nails into the hand of my loved one in a vain endeavour to draw tears from the very masculine Clara whom I was courting, and whom, years after, I met as a distinguished General at Kalka station on my way to Simla!

The play was selected for a gala performance at Drury Lane on May 17th, 1911, in honour of the visit of the German Emperor and Empress to the coronation of King George V. On this occasion it had an all-star cast with Fred Terry as Glossmore, John Hare as Sir John Vesey, Cyril Maude as Blount, Charles Wyndham as Smooth, Herbert Tree as

Graves, Arthur Bouchier as Stout, George Alexander as Alfred Evelyn and Irene Vanbrugh as Clara Douglas. Even the silent members in the club scene included actors like Henry Ainley, Gerald du Maurier, etc. This was one of the best performances ever seen on the English stage.

These are the only plays which need special mention in this volume. After Macready's retirement from the stage, Bulwer lost the chief incentive which had directed his pen to this branch of literature. The year after the production of *Money*, he retired from Parliament, and had more leisure to spend on what was the main work of his life—the writing of novels. To the novelist we must now return.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE NOVELS OF MIDDLE LIFE

“The heart loves repose, and the soul contemplation, but the mind needs action.”—*My Novel*.

IN the preceding chapter I dealt with my grandfather's dramatic authorship down to the publication of *Money* in 1840, and in Chapter V the period of his Parliamentary life as a Liberal was carried down to his retirement in 1841. In the eleven years that he was out of Parliament, his best literary work was accomplished, but before dealing with the books that belong to that period, mention must be made of two novels that were written before he resigned his seat at Lincoln.

The first of these was *Ernest Maltravers*, which was published in 1837, with its sequel, *Alice*, published in 1838. These two are really one novel in two parts, the characters being the same in both. The second was *Night and Morning*, published in 1841. *Ernest Maltravers* belongs to the group of novels which treat of contemporary society, and which the author described as “the most mature and, on the whole, the most comprehensive” he had yet written. *Alice*, the heroine of it, was his favourite female creation. The novel has a special interest because it has many autobiographical features, the hero himself being portrayed as an author.

The story of the two parts is long and complicated. Maltravers, a young man of eighteen, taking refuge one dark night in a wayside hut, finds it tenanted by Mr. Darvil, an ugly ruffian, and Alice his daughter, a lovely but completely

uneducated child of about fifteen. Alice warns him that her father intends to murder and rob him, and he escapes during the night. Alice, beaten and threatened by her father for having connived at the escape of the stranger, manages to leave the hut herself later in the night. Maltravers and Alice meet the next morning in the neighbouring town. Alice says that after the treatment she has received she will never go back to her father, and Maltravers undertakes her education. Assuming the name of Butler, he takes a cottage, where they live together in blissful happiness for many months. News reaches Maltravers that his father is dying, and he is obliged to leave Alice alone and hurry home. On his return he finds that she has disappeared and that the cottage is now occupied by others. Their stories then diverge, and they are both approaching old age before they are reunited.

Alice was found and carried off by her wicked father. She escapes from him again and finds a Mrs. Leslie, who befriends her and entrusts her to the care of a rich and kindly banker, Mr. Templeton, whom she eventually marries. Alice remains throughout her life a simple, sweet, retired woman wedded to the memory of her early love. The banker is ambitious, rises in the world, and is created Lord Vargrave. With them grows up a young girl, Evelyn, about whose parentage there is a mystery, but who regards the banker and Alice as her father and mother.

Maltravers, distracted at finding no trace of Alice, wanders all over the world, not so faithful as Alice, but always haunted by the memory of the girl he had loved and lost. In Italy he meets Valérie de Montaigne and her poet brother-in-law, Cesarini. He becomes intimate with this family and has a deep affection for Valérie. Later he comes to London,

enters Parliament, and becomes distinguished both as an orator and a writer. He meets the beautiful heiress, Constance, who falls in love with him and writes him anonymous letters of encouragement. They become engaged. Lumley Ferrers—the villain of the book, and surely the most odious character in fiction—is first introduced as the friend and travelling companion of the young Maltravers. Later they separate, and Ferrers, whose ambition is insatiable, is driven by jealousy of his former friend into a series of the most abominable crimes. He makes mischief between Maltravers and Constance by falsifying a letter from the former. The engagement is broken off, and Constance dies. Cesarini, who was in love with Constance and was implicated in the forgery, goes mad after her death.

Years roll by—Maltravers meets Evelyn and falls in love with her. They become engaged, though Evelyn really loves a young soldier called Legard, and regards Maltravers as a sort of patron and benefactor whom she worships as a hero. Ferrers, who was a nephew of the banker, and has succeeded his uncle as Lord Vargrave, again makes mischief by telling Maltravers that Evelyn is his own daughter by Alice. Eventually the tangle is unravelled. The wicked Vargrave is murdered by the insane Cesarini; Alice and Maltravers meet at long last and are reunited. The mystery of Evelyn's parentage is cleared up—she is not their child. She is happily married to her young lover, whom it transpires Maltravers had saved from suicide after gambling losses in early life.

In the library at Knebworth is a Japanese translation of this book. I cannot read the text, but the four little slender volumes bound in cardboard (which it is difficult to believe



can contain the 700 pages of the English novel) are copiously illustrated. The titles under the pictures have pencilled translations, but they are difficult to reconcile with any incidents in the English book. The costumes of the characters and the interiors of their houses are depicted by one whose only idea of European civilisation must have been derived from a cheap lodging-house in the poorest quarter of some cosmopolitan seaport. I have often wondered what impressions a Japanese reader would have formed of the "stately homes" of England which my grandfather so loved to describe, and the glittering *salons* of London and Paris, when following the fortunes of Marutsurabasu and Arisu (as Maltravers and Alice are called in the translation) through the bare cabins and Japanese scenery depicted in these comically oriental drawings.

*Night and Morning*, the next novel, is the third of the crime series. Better written than *Paul Clifford*, and more exciting than *Eugene Aram*, it is what to-day would be called a thriller. Though the purpose of the book is essentially moral—the triumph of right over wrong, of justice and mercy over injustice and cruelty—yet because a criminal is introduced—not this time as the hero, but as the friend and benefactor of the hero—the book aroused the usual stupid charge of immorality. That no defence would be called for to-day by an author who made crime and passion the subject of a novel, is evidence of the greater intellectual sincerity of the twentieth century as compared with the nineteenth, and my grandfather may claim to have had a share in bringing this about. It was always his object, as an artist, to convince his own generation that they were shocked by the crimes which ought rather to arouse their pity, and were indifferent to the vice which, though it violated no law,

should have shocked their human instincts. "It is," he wrote on this subject to his friend, John Forster, "the art of the highest genius to make you distinguish between the crime and the criminal, and in proportion as your soul shudders at the one, to let your heart beat with the heart of the other. It is not immoral, it is moral, and of the most impressive and epic order of morals, to arouse and sustain interest for a criminal. It is immoral when you commend the crime, and this from the first page of *Pelham* to the last of *Night and Morning* I have never done."

In this story Philip Beaufort marries Katherine Morton in a church far distant from the home of either of them, and conceals the fact for several years because his wife is a tradesman's daughter, and he fears that his rich uncle, disapproving of such an alliance, might not make him his heir. On the death of this uncle, Philip inherits his fortune, but before he can announce his marriage and produce proofs of the legitimacy of his two sons, he is killed by a fall from his horse. His younger brother, Robert, succeeds to the estate and turns out Katherine Morton and her boys, Philip and Sidney. Katherine dies, and the two boys are left alone in the world. Philip is strong and manly, Sidney weak and effeminate. Sidney is kidnapped by his mother's brother and brought up by him. Philip, unable to find him, is left to fight his battle with the world alone, and vows that he will never rest till he has avenged himself on his uncle, found his brother, established the fact of his parents' marriage, and recovered his property. He goes through many adventures, is driven by injustice from earning an honest living, meets and is befriended by William Gautrey, who, naturally good, has been forced into criminal practices by the wickedness of the vicious Lord Lilburne, Mrs. Robert Beaufort's

brother. There is an exciting scene where the coiners are raided by the police in Paris, and Gautrey is killed. Philip is rescued by Madame de Merville and passes as the Count de Vaudémont. He becomes rich, travels widely, and after spending years in India, returns to England to carry out the three objects of his life, all of which after many vicissitudes he eventually accomplishes. --

Throughout the book the contrast is maintained and continually emphasised between the lovable Gautrey, who commits crimes against the law, and the hateful Lilburne, who breaks no law but ruins the lives and happiness of many in the pursuit of his pleasures. The book has another purpose—to stimulate those who are down and out never to give in, but to persevere with dogged determination till they achieve their object in life. Philip Morton, who at the beginning of the book is odious as the spoilt child of rich parents, becomes almost too good to be true when cast adrift upon the world. At one moment, when his fortunes are at their lowest ebb, he stands upon a bridge in Paris, looking down at the waters of the Seine, and contemplates ending his unhappy existence in their depths. Two passers-by halt by his side, one of whom remarks that he had once contemplated self-destruction at that very spot, but had been saved. “How?” asks the other. “By a lucky chance? a sudden legacy?” “No,” replies the first; “time, faith, and energy—the three friends God has given to the poor.” These words give Philip just the encouragement that he needed. Henceforth he makes them his motto in life, and, acting on them, wins his way to success.

It was this quality of the book which later proved the salvation of a Frenchman at just such a critical moment in his life. The great French dressmaker, Worth, told my



mother that he owed both his life and fortune to *Night and Morning*. As a very young man, destitute, friendless and hopeless, he had made his way to the Seine to put an end to himself. On the Quai side he had stopped to look at some books. Among them he found a copy of *Night and Morning*. Without knowing why, he had bought it for a few sous, and returned to his lodgings to read it. After he had finished it he felt inspired to go on living. Like Philip Morton he set his teeth and vowed he would succeed. He said to himself, as Philip had once said, "Fortune has given you a fall. What then, courage, and at her again!" As a result he lived to build up the great house which still bears his name.

A very different person, who was also strongly affected by the book, was Lord Macaulay, who wrote to the author, "It moved my feelings more than anything you have written, and more than a man of forty-three, who has been much tossed about the world, is easily moved by works of the imagination."

We have now reached the period in which my grandfather's best literary work begins. Being out of Parliament, and having given up writing plays for Macready, he was able to give his whole time and thought to the main business of his life—the writing of novels. He worked with unremitting energy, his reading was wide and continuous, he was always "taking in coal"; and the result was the production of a number of novels of the most diverse character. This period begins with *Zanoni*, the first of his mystical novels, and the best of all his purely imaginative works; it includes two historical novels, *The Last of the Barons* and *Harold, Lucretia*, the last of the crime novels, and ends with *The Caxtons* and *My Novel*, by far the best of those which

deal with contemporary society. It also includes three works of poetry, *Eva*, *The New Timon* and *King Arthur*, as well as a translation of Schiller's poems, and a play, *Not So Bad As We Seem*, written specially to raise funds for the Guild of Literature. These eleven years of comparative ease, in fact, produced almost as great an output of mature work as the first ten years of enforced drudgery. They were also years of much sorrow, in which occurred the death of his mother, his daughter Emily, and Lady Blessington, his most valued woman-friend.

The combined strain of excessive brain work and domestic sorrow caused a complete breakdown of his health in 1844, and all work had to be suspended for several months. He was restored to health by a simple water-cure at Malvern, and was again in full activity before the end of the year. The treatment from which he derived such benefit was made the subject of a pamphlet published under the title *Confessions of a Water Patient*.

The first of the works now under consideration was not a new conception. The idea of a superman such as Zanoni had first occurred to my grandfather in a dream as far back as 1835, when he was reading some books on astrology and metaphysics. His first tentative treatment of the subject in one of his published works is to be found, as already mentioned, in Voltkman the astrologer, in *Godolphin*. In 1838 he contributed to Harrison Ainsworth's magazine, *The Monthly Chronicle*, an unfinished story called *Zicci*, which is in fact a somewhat different version of the first forty chapters of *Zanoni*. After finishing *Night and Morning* he reverted to this earlier work, recast it, changed its title and completed it as a new novel early in 1842. It was published before the end of that year.

*Zanoni* differs from all its predecessors in owing little, if anything, to the development of a plot. It is principally concerned with the delineation of a character unique in fiction. The scenes of the story are all laid outside England—Naples, Rome, the Greek islands, Paris. The date selected is that of the French Revolution. All the incidents in the story, and all the other characters, serve only to provide opportunities for this remarkable person to demonstrate the extent and the limitations of his occult power.

Zanoni is presented to us as a man who, having renounced all earthly ties, desires and affections, and having by intensive study acquired unlimited knowledge, has attained to such complete spiritual perfection that, with the aid of an elixir compounded from herbs, he can prolong his life indefinitely, and has in fact lived on through many generations. The existence, thus supernaturally prolonged, is not that of extreme age, but of one in the prime of life, enjoying exceptional physical strength and beauty. Here is no emaciated fakir or ascetic Yogi, no hermit vowed to poverty and living in seclusion, but a man of the world, commanding untold wealth, a traveller in many lands, and speaking like a native the language of every country he visits. Besides possessing strength and wealth, he is endowed with psychic powers which enable him to foresee any danger to himself and to take such measures as may be necessary to avert it.

Such is Zanoni—the superman—at the commencement of the story, but the qualities which make him superior to other men are conditional upon his complete renunciation of all worldly ties, whether of ambition, hatred or love. This condition has presumably been fulfilled through all the long centuries of his existence since he first became initiated,



but in this story he falls in love with Viola—a beautiful Neapolitan singer. If he could only see her happy with another, he would be satisfied, and he tries to bring about her marriage to Clarence Glyndon, a young English painter. But Glyndon thinks it would be more exciting to be a Zanoni than to marry Viola, and elects to become initiated. Viola also does not want to marry Glyndon, as she is deeply in love with Zanoni. So Zanoni marries her and loses his special power in all that concerns her. During one of his absences, Viola is persuaded that the occult powers of her husband are derived not from God but from the devil. Fear and superstition overpower her love, and she takes to flight with the child of their marriage. Zanoni traces her to Paris—then in the last days of the Reign of Terror—and, unable to save her except at the price of his own life, realises in self-sacrifice the highest happiness of his spiritual being. Love that can die for another is proved a greater quality than wisdom that can live for ever in spiritual isolation.

Many readers have sought to give to the book an allegorical interpretation. The author refused to supply one himself, but in later editions he printed with his approval one supplied to him by Miss Harriet Martineau. *Zanoni* was my grandfather's own favourite of all his works. Into it he put the highest flights of his poetical imagination. It is silly to condemn its spookiness, and vain to try and explain its mystery. It is in fact a fairy story for grown-up readers, and if read as such will be found to contain much beauty of thought. In acknowledging a gift of the book, Thomas Carlyle wrote of it: "I confidently gather that it will be a liberating voice for much that lay dumb imprisoned in many human souls; that it will shake old deep-set errors looser in

their rootings, and through such chinks as are possible let in light on dark places very greatly in need of light ! I honour much the unwearied, steadfast perseverance with which you prosecute the painfulest, but also the noblest, of human callings, almost the summary of all that is left of nobleness in human callings in these poor days. I cordially wish you a long career, and a more and more victorious one."

From the conception of a spiritual superman, Bulwer-Lytton turned to the creation of a material one. He chose for his next novel the period of the Wars of the Roses in English history, and for his hero, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick—the King-maker. Here was a theme worthy of his romantic hero-worship, and what character more congenial to his taste than the last of the feudal Barons of England, who could make and unmake kings ?

In writing *The Last of the Barons*, my grandfather had two objects in mind. The first was to draw a vivid picture of mid-fifteenth-century England—the passing of the age of feudalism into that of commercialism. Warwick is the representative of the feudal State, Edward IV the merchant King. A clash between representatives of these two systems is shown to be inevitable, and as Edward IV is the symbol of the future—the age of printing, the age of steam—and Warwick the symbol of the past—the age of individual war-lords with their personal armies and their powerful alliances—it was inevitable that when the clash came it was the King that triumphed over the King-maker. With what vicissitudes of fortune, what plots and counter-plots, with what treachery and perjury this was effected, it is the purpose of the book to show. With the Plantagenets passed away the power of the feudal nobility, with the Tudors that of

the Church, and with the Stuarts that of the Crown. For the purpose of illustrating this feature of the age he was describing, the author introduced, not an historical character, Caxton, the first English printer, as he might have done, but a fictitious creation of his own—Adam Warner, the old scholar with his crazy model of a steam-engine, which caused him to fall a victim to the superstition of his day and be hanged as a wizard by the representative of the Church.

The second object of the book was to portray the character of Warwick, and supply a possible explanation of one of the unsolved mysteries of history—namely, what it was that caused this powerful nobleman, this staunch supporter of the House of York, so suddenly in 1470 not only to take up arms against the King, whom he had put upon the throne, but to espouse the cause of the Lancastrians, his lifelong enemies. The author shows in the course of the novel that though Warwick had been offended, first by the King's secret marriage with Elizabeth Woodville and the royal favour subsequently shown to the Queen's relations; secondly, by the betrothal which the King had arranged between his sister Margaret and the Count of Charolois, afterwards Duke of Burgundy, at the very moment that Warwick, with his sovereign's knowledge and approval, was arranging with Louis XI of France a marriage for this same Princess with one of the royal princes of France; yet a reconciliation had been effected by the intervention of Richard, Duke of Gloucester, and Warwick's brother, the Archbishop of York. In 1469 a fresh cause of dissension was created by the refusal of the King to sanction a marriage between his brother, the Duke of Clarence, and Isabel, Warwick's eldest daughter. This difference, however, was



also smoothed over, and the marriage took place. A rebellion broke out which Warwick suppressed, and Edward visited him in his castle at Middleham. Subsequent to this visit, the King spoke of Warwick and his brothers as "his best friends." Three months later they were at open war. What was the cause? The novelist supplies the answer. Edward IV attempted an assault on Warwick's youngest daughter, Anne, whilst she was one of the ladies at his Court. Only so great an outrage could explain both the implacable hatred which was thus created between the two and the complete secrecy as to its cause.

After the publication of *The Last of the Barons*, in 1843, it was three years before another novel appeared. They were busy years, spent partly in travel and partly on literary work other than fiction. As he wrote in *My Novel*: "The writer has this advantage over other men, that his repose is not indolence. His duties, rightly fulfilled, are discharged to earth and men in other capacities than those of action. If he is not seen among those who act, he is all the while maturing some noiseless influence, which will guide or illumine, civilise or elevate, the restless men whose noblest actions are but the obedient agencies of the thoughts of writers."

My grandfather revisited Italy, translated the poems of Schiller, and wrote a long poem—*The New Timon*—which described contemporary life in London, and contained a number of political sketches. It was this poem which, published anonymously, contained some disparaging lines about Tennyson and called forth a scathing reply from the poet. The offending lines were expunged from the later editions, after the authorship of the book had been acknowledged. During these years he also wrote a version of the

stage of the Greek play *Œdipus Tyrannus*, and began work on two novels simultaneously. These were *Lucretia* and *The Caxtons*. The former, which was the last of his crime novels, was finished first and published in 1846. The play was to have been acted by Phelps at Sadler's Wells Theatre, but the storm of criticism aroused by *Lucretia* caused the author to withdraw it, and it has never since been either published or acted. *The Caxtons* was not finished and published till 1849.

In my opinion *Lucretia* is the worst of all my grandfather's novels, and *The Caxtons* the best. It is difficult to believe that they were being written simultaneously. *Lucretia* deals with the vilest, cruellest, most despicable human beings—criminals without a single redeeming feature. It begins with a father taking his small son to see the execution of his mother, whom his jealousy has sent to the guillotine, and it ends with a mother killing her son with a poisoned ring! *The Caxtons*, on the other hand, is a delightful picture of the life of a particularly charming family. It is the only one of my grandfather's novels which has scarcely any melodramatic element, and which depends for its interest, not on the development of some intricate plot but on the delineation of very attractive characters and on conversations which are full of wit and humour that never become cynical. *Lucretia* not only repels its readers by the cruelties of the three criminals whose life stories are unfolded in its pages, but offends as a work of art. Its story is badly told, and the incidents of its gloomy tragedy are not unfolded dramatically in their natural sequence, but are mostly revealed by tedious retrospective narratives long after they have occurred. *The Caxtons*, which belongs to the same period and was actually being written at the same time as *Lucretia*, stands out as the

healthiest, pleasantest and best-written of all the author's novels—the *chef-d'œuvre* of his literary art.

Although these two books were begun and partly written simultaneously, it was three years after the publication of *Lucretia* before *The Caxtons* was given to the public. In those three years Bulwer-Lytton not only wrote *King Arthur*, his most ambitious poetical work, but also produced another novel, *Harold*. This, the last—and in some ways the best—of the historical novels, deals with the closing years of the reign of Edward the Confessor, from the reinstatement, after their outlawry, of Earl Godwin and his sons to the death of Harold on the field of Hastings, and the establishment of the Norman Dynasty under William I. The period covered by this novel is not so long as that of *The Last of the Barons*, and the history is not so complicated. The story is simply told, and with considerable dramatic power. Harold, the hero, is endowed with all the author's nineteenth-century liberalism and generous qualities, and in his person yet another ideal is established. Zanoni surrendered even his life for the woman he loved; Harold surrenders even his love for the good of his country. The mysticism which the author loved to introduce into all his romances is here embodied in the fictitious personality of Hilda, the Druidic prophetess, whose forebodings and shadowy visions of the future provide an atmosphere of impending doom throughout the story.

The material for *Harold* was provided by the library of Mr. Tennyson d'Eyncourt at Bayon's Manor, which contained a specially fine collection of old Saxon chronicles. Bayon's Manor was in my grandfather's constituency when he was M.P. for Lincoln, and Tennyson d'Eyncourt was one of his warmest supporters. They had many tastes in



common, and my grandfather made frequent use of his friend's library. The study of the documents on which the story of *Harold* was based occupied many years, but when the story was actually begun, it was written with incredible speed, and actually completed within a month. It was in the printer's hands at the beginning of 1848, but its publication was delayed till June of that year, owing to the tragic death of the author's daughter, Emily.

*The Caxtons* was completed and published in the following year, and was immediately followed by *My Novel*, which was published in 1853.

*My Novel* is the last of the melodramatic novels. It marks the transition from *The Caxtons* to *What Will He Do With It?* and *Kenelm Chillingly*, but with a definite hark-back to *Night and Morning* and *Ernest Maltravers*. It starts with the same atmosphere as *The Caxtons*; and the first volume is wholly delightful, with much wisdom and many charming characters. Then it develops the most complicated and most skilfully contrived of all the author's plots, and although there are the usual vocative appeals—"O Public Man, O Fate, O Youth, O Gentleman and Soldier, etc."—the many adjectives with capital letters—the Ideal, the Real, the Beautiful, the True, etc.—and one ghastly sentence, when Harley L'Estrange, an otherwise delightful character, says to his mother, "Countess of Lansmere, hear me!" yet there are fewer and less degraded villains than in most of the earlier novels, and the book ends on the softer note with which it began. There is a fuller and more detailed picture of the House of Commons and English political life at the beginning of the nineteenth century in *My Novel* than in any of the other novels; it was probably this book which prompted Trollope's remark that Bulwer-Lytton "thoroughly

understood the political status of his own country, a subject on which I think Dickens was marvellously ignorant, and which Thackeray had never studied." The description of the election at Lansmere in the days before the Reform Bill, and before the introduction of the Ballot, is particularly interesting.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LAST NOVELS

"I have known the public so long that I cannot but regard it as a friend."—*Caxtoniana*.

BULWER-LYTTON returned to Parliament in 1852. During the fourteen years that he sat in the House of Commons as Member for Hertfordshire till he was made a Peer in 1866, he only wrote two novels—*What Will He Do With It ?* and *A Strange Story*—and from 1866 till his death in 1873 he only published one, *The Coming Race*, though in the last years of his life he was again engaged on writing two simultaneously, one of which, *Kenelm Chillingly*, was finished ; the other, *The Parisians*, was still incomplete at the time of his death. Both were published posthumously.

A brief examination of these five novels must be made before making a final review of the author and his works as a whole.

*What Will He Do With It ?* is the last, and the best, of the series of novels dealing with contemporary life to which belong *Pelham*, *The Disowned*, and *Godolphin* in the early period, and *Ernest Maltravers*, *Alice* and *My Novel* in the period of middle life. From these I would exclude *The Caxtons*, which I consider the best of all my grandfather's novels for the very reason that it differs from all the others in having scarcely any plot and being comparatively uneventful and unemotional. All the others have intricate plots and are crowded with events that arouse the strongest



emotions. Reading them in the order in which they were written, there is noticeable a progressive improvement in style, in character-drawing and in arrangement of plot. *Pelham*, the first, has a freshness and light-heartedness which distinguishes it, and gives it a particular charm as the work of a very young man, but *What Will He Do With It ?*, the last, is the work of an experienced master. In this book there are fourteen different characters, all of which are intimately connected with the story, all separate links in one chain, each one having an influence at some moment in his or her life on the fortunes of all the others. At the commencement of the book they are all scattered both in time and place, and the question which arises in the reader's mind as each is introduced is, "What will the author do with them?" They might all have led happy and successful lives, but because only one out of all the fourteen is a conscienceless villain, and all the others are prevented by pride of one kind or another from facing the truth and behaving like rational human beings, they are all kept as unhappy as possible through 1400 pages, until the secret which sets everything to rights is divulged in the very last chapter. It is a good story, well told. Though the heroisms which led each of these good people to sacrifice his or her happiness in pursuance of some ideal of honour, duty, dignity or reputation were more common in the days when the book was written than they are to-day, similar tragedies are still enacted and will continue to be enacted until complete sincerity and truth become easier to attain than they have hitherto proved to be.

In the same month of February 1858 that *What Will He Do With It ?* was finished and the last chapters sent to *Blackwood's Magazine*, where it had been appearing in

monthly parts, Lord Palmerston's Government was defeated in the House of Commons and Lord Derby was commissioned to form a new Government. A few weeks later, on Lord Ellenborough's resignation, Bulwer-Lytton was offered and accepted the post of Secretary of State for the Colonies. On June 19th the following verses appeared in *Punch* :

### PEGASUS IN HARNESS ;

OR, SIR BULWER-LYTTON IN DOWNING STREET

To think of the great BULWER-LYTTON,  
Tied down to a Downing Street stool !  
The pen that such fictions has written,  
Turned a jog-trot Colonial tool !

. . . . .

Say, on which of his gifts in reliance  
Knebworth's Baronet minister made is—  
For writing the *Lady of Lyons*,  
Or for being the Lion of Ladies ?

Was't the great convict question to deal with  
(As to which penal pundits have differed),  
DERBY chose him who taught us to feel with  
*Eugene Aram, Lucretia, Paul Clifford* ?

Did he think, to debates without end  
(Recreation and rest alike scorning),  
From a Downing Street day's work to wend,  
Would suit him who composed *Night and Morning* ?

Or deemed he (see WARREN on BLACKSTONE'S  
Legal maxim "set prigs to catch prigs"),  
He who'd had such success with the *Caxtons*,  
Must be more than a match for the W(h)igs ?

Or, as DERBY loves jokes, was his choice  
Made to see how the thing would "JOHN SMITH" hit?  
To set England's unanimous voice  
Inquiring, "What *will* he do with it?"

Or was there a sly high-bred stab in it  
At his lit'rary sub— thus to tell him,  
That *Vivian Grey* in the Cabinet  
Would find fit companion in *Pelham*?

After the publication of *What Will He Do With It?* four years elapsed before the next novel appeared. While in office, of course, all literary work had to be laid aside. With the defeat of Lord Derby's Government in 1859, my grandfather's brief official career came to an end, and he went abroad to recuperate his health. He at once resumed his literary activity, but the first work he undertook was a political poem, *St. Stephens*, which he himself described as "my prose verses on our nation." It was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1860. In the autumn of that year he was invited by Dickens to contribute a story to *All The Year Round*. The invitation was accepted at the end of the year, and the new novel, *A Strange Story*, was completed by the end of the following year. It began to appear anonymously in *All The Year Round* in August 1861.

This story was a departure from the subject-matter of his last three novels and a reversion to the mysticism of *Zanoni*. Like its predecessor, *A Strange Story* also originated in a dream, but the difference between the two books was the difference between a good dream and a bad one. Both the novels are built upon the conception of occult powers, unrecognised as yet in any human philosophy, which enable their possessor to have a foreknowledge of events which



may threaten his own safety, to influence at a distance the conduct of others, and to prolong his own existence by means of an elixir containing the vital principle of life. In *Zanoni* these powers are possessed by a man of the noblest ideals and the highest intelligence, and are used only for the welfare of mankind. In *A Strange Story* they are possessed by a sensuous, conscienceless, soulless materialist, and used for the promotion of his own pleasures and the destruction of any obstacle to their fulfilment. I described *Zanoni* as a fairy story for grown-up readers. *A Strange Story* is rather a nightmare for the superstitious. As a work of art, the story suffers from the form in which it is told, being the personal narrative of a sceptical doctor ; and its effectiveness is marred by long and tedious arguments between the supposed narrator and a medical friend, in an attempt to find natural explanations for the supernatural occurrences which are related. The same idea is much better embodied in a short story, *The Haunted and the Haunters*, which Bulwer-Lytton contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1857. This is a really good ghost story which thrills without boring the reader.

The next eight years produced *Caxtoniana*, a volume of excellent essays "On Life, Literature, and Manners," a number of revised editions of former works, two volumes of poetry, a three-act comedy in rhyme, a metrical translation of the Odes and Epodes of Horace, but no new novel. The last story to appear during the author's lifetime was *The Coming Race*, which was published anonymously by Blackwood in the spring of 1871. It was a single volume describing the experiences of a young American who falls down the shaft of a mine and finds himself in an underground world inhabited by a people whose knowledge and habits

of life had progressed far beyond anything even imagined by those who lived on the surface of the globe.

*The Coming Race* was not merely a story of adventure, such as might have been written by Jules Verne or H. G. Wells—it had a definite political object. At that date (just after the Franco-Prussian war) there was much talk in advanced political circles of universal peace, the brotherhood of man, equality of all kinds, the dignity of labour, the mechanisation of industry, etc. Lord Lytton (he had been raised to the Peerage in 1866) was rather scornful of all these radical panaceas, and he set himself to imagine a community of human beings in which they were all realised—not here and there by a few specially gifted people, but universally and of necessity—and to demonstrate what the result would be. This he accomplished by the simple device of endowing every individual with an equal and unlimited power of destruction. For this purpose it was necessary to imagine a whole community living within an area completely separated from the rest of the world. Such a community he might have located on another planet, but he chose the simpler method of locating it in an underground territory in the bowels of the earth. It was easier at that date to imagine an inhabitant of our planet falling down a disused mine-shaft into such an underground world, than to provide him with a vehicle which would carry him to another planet. The next requirement was to invent a power, inherent in each individual, which could be used either for the destruction of any possible enemy of the community, or for supplying the means of promoting its welfare. To the power thus conceived, Lord Lytton gave the name of Vril, and the people possessing it he called the Vrilya.

With these means, supplied by his fertile imagination, he

was able to accomplish his object ; and in doing so, he not only anticipated all the developments of electrical science since his day, but even the discovery of nuclear energy with which our present generation was first made acquainted by the dropping of an atomic bomb on the Japanese town of Hiroshima in August 1945.

The following quotations from this book will illustrate the measure of its prophetic character :

“ Vril,” writes the author, “ is capable of being raised and disciplined into the mightiest agency over all forms of matter, animate or inanimate. It can destroy like a flash of lightning ; yet differently applied, it can replenish or invigorate life, heal and preserve. . . .

“ On the report of some observer in an air-boat, they can estimate unerringly the nature of intervening obstacles, and the extent to which the projectile instrument should be charged, so as to reduce to ashes within a space of time too short for me to venture to specify it, a capital twice as vast as London. . . .

“ War between the Vril-discoverers ceased, for they brought the art of destruction to such perfection as to annul all superiority in numbers, discipline or military skill. If army met army, and both had command of this agency, it could be but the annihilation of each. The age of war was therefore gone, but with the cessation of war other effects bearing upon the social state soon became apparent. Man was so completely at the mercy of man, that all notions of Government by force gradually vanished from political systems and forms of law. . . . Now there was no longer either the necessity of self-preservation, or the pride of aggrandisement, to make one State desire to preponderate in population over another.”

The first object of the book was achieved by the conclusive evidence which it contains that all the radical panaceas conceived by the most ardent idealist were completely realised by the Vrillya.

The second object was demonstrated by the boredom and



fear which gradually overwhelmed the young American who accidentally found himself amongst this most enlightened, but terrible, community. It was an inevitable consequence of the existence of Vril in every individual that all human emotions which might conflict with the well-being of another had to be eliminated. Passion, hatred, jealousy, ambition—in fact all feelings other than that of cheerful subservience to the general welfare—would lead to the instantaneous elimination of the individual expressing them. From such a society, in spite of its admirable efficiency, the young American was glad to escape as soon as an opportunity could be found.

Now that we have come to the end of the long and varied list of novels which my grandfather produced during his lifetime, it is worth while to take a last look at them as a whole. One thing is very noticeable. All the novels of his earlier life deal with violent passions, with the baser human qualities at war with the finer ones, and worldly success vitiated by meanness or unkindness. The result was a series of melodramatic tragedies of varying merit. In reading them one is inclined to apply to their author his own description of Ernest Maltravers—"He had much of the milk of human kindness, but little of the oil." These books were written by a man who was himself voyaging through life in very rough seas, and who was for most of the time the centre of controversy. This period of stress and strain reached its peak in 1858, when he was in office. But from 1859 onwards his life entered a calmer period and ran on smoothly to the end.

The books of this later period reflect the change in the life of their author. These last novels, beginning with *The Caxtons*, have a calmer atmosphere, more humour, greater

wisdom, and above all the oil of human kindness which was lacking in the earlier ones. Consequently, the novels which made his reputation during his lifetime, and by which he is chiefly known to-day, are less readable now than the later ones, which are little known and seldom read. Those who complain, as Thackeray did, of his "love of big words and premeditated fine writing," or, as Conrad did, of his "elegant verbiage," and "insincere sentences," I would recommend to read these later novels which are less open to such criticisms and have a more pleasing combination of wit, charm and kindliness.

*Kenelm Chillingly*, the last, must be included in this category. The hero of this book is an entirely original character, different from any of the author's previous creations. With a solemn and even mournful exterior, a cheerful disposition, strong physique, and a healthy appetite, he travels on foot through the countryside, meeting with interesting and unexpected adventures and scattering benefits wherever he goes. All this part of the book is delightful, and as good as *The Caxtons*; but half-way through *Kenelm* returns to the society of his own class, and the interest diminishes. Then he meets with Lily and gives to this half-educated child the passionate love which no other woman has been able to arouse. It is a case of the author recurring to his first boyish romance, the shadow of which had haunted him throughout his life. "Is it," asks Audley Eggerton in *My Novel*, "is it that, as we approach death, all the first fair feelings of young life come back to us mysteriously?" It was so in this case. This was the first time that he had allowed himself to introduce the name of his Ealing love into any of his books. After the lapse of fifty years he could still shed tears over the memory which it

revived, and his last story ends with the tragedy of frustrated love with which his own life began.

*The Parisians*, its companion novel, dealing with the Siege of Paris and the war of the Commune, was already appearing anonymously in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1872. It is immensely long, and the only one of the twenty-four novels that is actually tedious. It was never quite completed. *Kenelm Chillingly* was finished on January 1st, 1873, only a few days before the author's death on the 18th. It was published later in the same year and 3150 copies were sold on the day of its publication.



## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSION

“Calmly to time I leave these images  
Of things experienced, suffer'd, felt and seen.”  
—*Poems.*

IT will be seen from the foregoing chapters that Bulwer-Lytton, who published his first volume of verses at the age of seventeen, continued his literary work to the very end of his life, in spite of many other activities, with a constitution that was never robust, with frequently recurring breakdowns in health, and under a strain of mental distress caused by his unhappy marriage which even a stronger man might well have been unable to bear. His industry was amazing, as the number of his books testify. He died as he had lived—pen in hand. It now only remains to make a general review of his work, and to note some of the features which specially characterised it.

Two characteristics in particular distinguished him from his many great contemporaries. The first is the universality of his genius. His fame is that of a writer, but he was not only a writer. He was also a statesman, who sat in the House of Commons for twenty-four years ; and although politics did not constitute the main business of his life, he shone even among those to whom politics meant everything. He won a reputation as an orator when still a young man, and never lost it. Whether as Liberal Member for Lincoln, or Conservative Member for Hertfordshire, his eloquence always assured him a full and appreciative audience in the House

of Commons. He even held office as a Cabinet Minister, and was a Secretary of State for a short period. That he did not continue to sit with his colleagues in opposition after their defeat, and resume office with them when they returned to power, was not due to any failure on his part, or to any dissatisfaction on the part of his chief, but only to the public scandal created by the behaviour of his wife, who pursued him with vindictive hatred, and by his own ill-advised attempt to have her placed under restraint. It was the mental distress caused by this domestic tragedy which destroyed his health and forced him to withdraw from the limelight which necessarily follows the words and actions of a Secretary of State. How many other Cabinet Ministers, either in his own generation or any other, have also achieved an abiding reputation in the field of literature, or how many other writers of equal eminence have also held office as a Secretary of State?

Even as a writer, my grandfather stood almost alone in the variety of his writings. His reputation rests chiefly on his novels, and it is only as a novelist that I have dealt with him in this book ; but he was also a poet, an historian, a dramatist, and an essayist. If he had never been a Member of Parliament, or concerned himself with politics, if he had never written anything but novels, would he have been a better novelist? Possibly ; but he would not have been Bulwer-Lytton.

The other feature which specially characterised my grandfather was his reaction to hostile criticism ; it pursued him throughout his life, and he was intensely sensitive to it. What particularly hurt him was that whenever he published a book it was not the book alone that was attacked—no author can expect to escape criticism of his

work—but he himself was pursued with the utmost rancour, his motives misrepresented, his morals impugned, his character vilified. He hit back in his prefaces, and in 1847 defended himself in a pamphlet called *A Word to the Public*. These complaints and self-justifications only served to whet the appetite of the critics, for it revealed to them how much pain they had been able to inflict on a man whom they hated either for his politics or because they were the partisans of his embittered wife, and had been plied with stories of his hypocrisy and cruelty. The best remedy for such attacks was supplied by Lord Macaulay, who wrote to him as follows :

“ How many men in literary history have at your age enjoyed half your reputation ? Who that ever enjoyed half your reputation was secure from the attacks of envious dunces ? And what harm, in the long run, did all the envy of all the dunces in the world ever do to any man of real merit ? What writer’s place in the estimation of mankind was ever fixed by any writings except his own ? Who would in our time know that Dryden and Pope ever had a single enemy, if they had not themselves been so injudicious as to tell us so ? You may rely on this, that there are very few authors living, and certainly not one of your detractors, who would not most gladly take all your literary vexations for the credit of having written your worst work. If, however, you really wish to be free from detraction, I can very easily put you in the way of being so. Bring out a succession of poems as bad as Mr. Robert Montgomery’s *Luther*, and of prose works in the style of Mr. Gleig’s *Life of Warren Hastings*, and I will undertake that in a few years you shall have completely silenced malevolence. To think that you will ever silence it while you continue to write what is immediately reprinted at Philadelphia, Paris and Brussels, would be absurd.”

The interesting thing is that, deeply as my grandfather resented these attacks, they never discouraged him, but



rather forced him to increased effort. We have already seen how the failure of his first play only stimulated him to write another, and indeed the prodigious literary output of his life—fifty-five distinct and separate publications in seventy years of life, or fifty-nine, if the four published after his death are included—each novel, be it remembered, consisting of three volumes, and three of them, *My Novel*, *What Will He Do With It?* and *The Parisians*, running into four—may be partly attributed to the spur applied by his critics. As he wrote to Lady Blessington about the attacks on *Lucretia*, “All this vituperation goads me on. Who can keep quiet when the tarantula bites him?”

A fresh examination of my grandfather's novels, for the purpose of writing this short book, has led me to the conclusion that sentiment is the most evanescent quality, and humour the most enduring. The nineteenth century was an intensely sentimental age, and my grandfather was a typical exponent of it. In his books the men shed tears as readily and as frequently as the women, and the women faint as often as the men cry. It may be that these fictitious characters are more sentimental than the living types which they represented, but the exaggeration cannot have been very marked, as the contemporary readers of these books do not seem to have found anything unusual in these traits. Indeed, in the letters which my grandfather received from his friends, as each of his novels was published, most of the writers confess that they “shed tears” as they read them. I did not, however, come across any case where a lady wrote that she had fainted while reading *The Haunted and the Haunters*! The fact that shedding tears and fainting are not so fashionable to-day as they were in the nineteenth century is perhaps one of the reasons why Bulwer-Lytton's novels

are not so popular to-day as they were when they were written. For the same reason *The Caxtons*, which is the least sentimental of them all and has plenty of humour, is the most enjoyable to-day, and *Money*, in which the sentiment is redeemed by the humour, is the most enduring of his plays.

Another feature of the nineteenth century from which the present century has largely freed itself is its insincerity. It was essentially an age of make-believe. This feature is evident in its architecture, almost every house being made to pretend to be other than it really was, in the lay-out of its gardens, in the ruins which it built, in its dress, in its habits, in its conversation, in almost everything. Conrad, in his *Nigger of the Narcissus*, tells how old Singleton in the Mercantile Marine was found reading *Pelham*, and says :

“The popularity of Bulwer-Lytton in the forecastles of Southern-going ships is a wonderful and bizarre phenomenon. What ideas do his polished and so curiously insincere sentences awaken in the simple minds of the big children who people those dark and wandering places of the earth? What meaning can their rough, inexperienced souls find in the elegant verbiage of his pages? What excitement? What forgetfulness? What appeasement? Mystery! Is it the fascination of the incomprehensible?—is it the charm of the impossible? Or are these beings who exist beyond the pale of life stirred by his tales as by an enigmatical disclosure of a resplendent world that exists within the frontier of infamy and filth, within that border of dirt and hunger, of misery and dissipation, that comes down on all sides to the water's edge of the incorruptible ocean, and is the only thing they know of life, the only thing they see of surrounding land—those life-long prisoners of the sea? Mystery!”

Bulwer-Lytton was not an insincere writer, but he was a weaver of romance in a romantic age. Into the game



of make-believe of his time he entered with as much zest as any child who bestrides a chair and fancies that it is driving a coach-and-four. Those who wish to escape from the unpleasant realities of their own lives in any age may find enjoyment in his books, as did the "rough, inexperienced souls" of Conrad's sailors.

My last word must be a recognition of the fact that Bulwer-Lytton was essentially an intellectual writer. He was no mere story-teller or weaver of plots. As a story-teller some of his best work is to be found in the short and little-known stories contained in *The Student*. But all his longer novels abound in evidence of a scholarly and intellectual mind, of wide reading, knowledge of the world and insight into human character. Various as were the subjects about which he wrote, he had studied them all. There is nothing superficial in his treatment of any of them. Anthony Trollope, one of his contemporaries, recognised this quality in his writing. He says of him in his autobiography :

"Bulwer was a man of very great parts. Better educated than either of those I have named before him [Thackeray and Dickens], he was always able to use his erudition, and he thus produced novels from which very much not only may be, but must be, learned by his readers. . . . He had read extensively, and was always apt to give his readers the benefit of what he knew. The result has been that very much more than amusement may be obtained from Bulwer's novels."

My grandfather lived in a great age of English literature, and the offer of a public funeral in Westminster Abbey was a recognition that he was not the least of his great contemporaries.

Professor Jowett, preaching the funeral sermon, spoke of



him as a man “ of genuine kindness, of endless activity of mind, of great knowledge, and of a noble interest in literature and literary men . . . one of England’s greatest writers, and one of the most distinguished men of our time.”

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